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# Guitarist

Issue 512

JULY 2024

# AMERICAN DREAM

ARE THESE THE BEST USA-BUILT ELECTRICS UNDER £2K?

**FEATURES**

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BERNIE MARSDEN GUITAR COLLECTION
PABLO VAN DE POEL
& MORE

*Reviews*

PRS S2 STANDARD 24 AND VELA

EPIPHONE DAVE GROHL DG-335

SHEERAN LOOPER+

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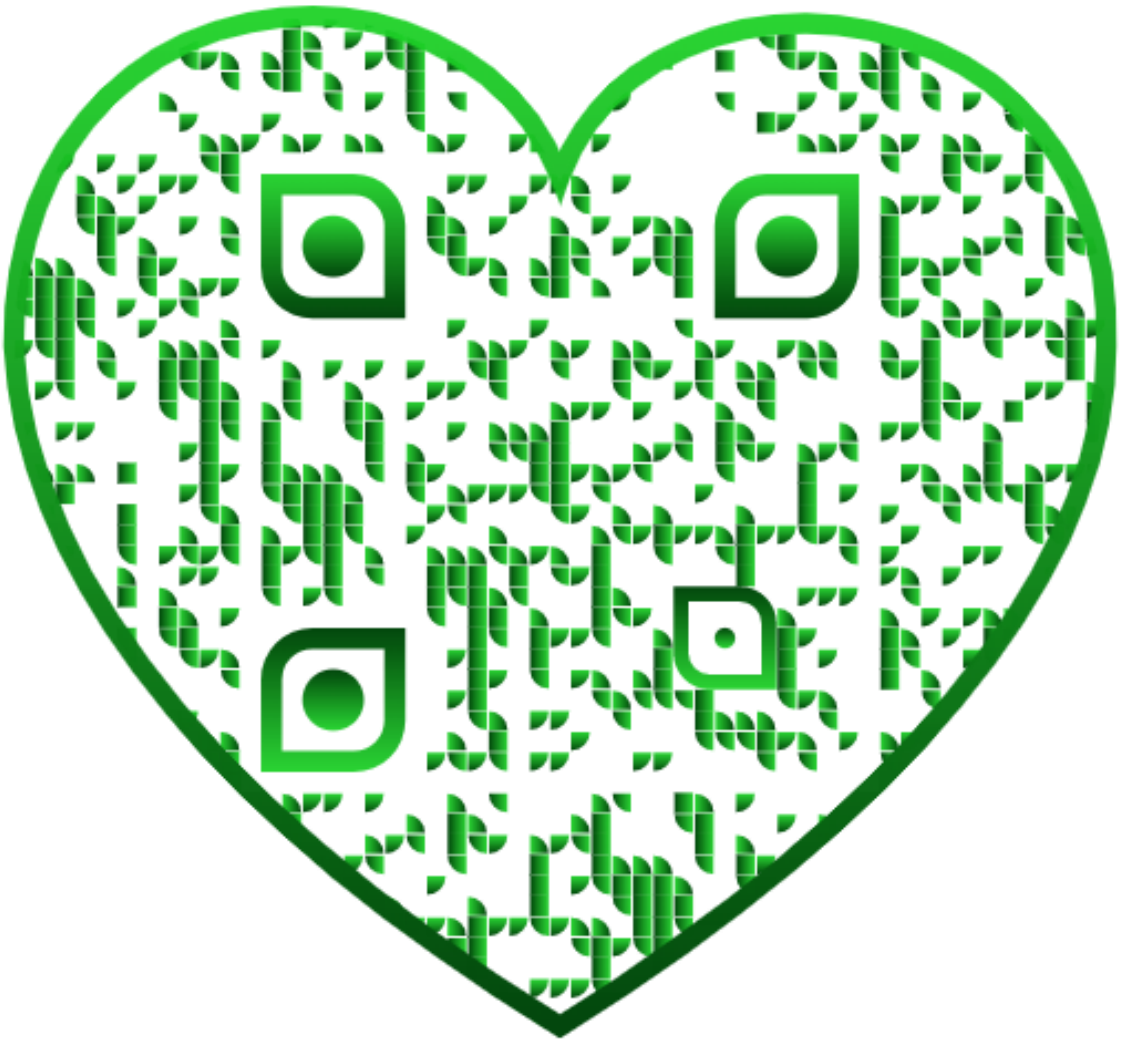

# INTRODUCING...

## FINDING "THAT" SOUND

"This whole concept started in my studio. When recording, the musicians were looking for tones and textures that we couldn't get straight from the guitar so I started collecting great sounding pedals. Then we started building devices with the help of some friends. That's how the first pedal prototypes were born. We believe the pedals we've created are highly usable, great-sounding pieces of professional gear. A magic pedal makes the pedal board. We're trying to design pedals that make the board and stay on it".

**– Paul Reed Smith**

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Guitarist

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# Music And Silence

This month everyone at *Guitarist* was saddened by three losses close to our hearts. Firstly, we learned that Dickey Betts of The Allman Brothers Band, whose obituary can be found on page 47, had died aged 80. Then, almost as we went to press, we learned with a sense of shock that Duane Eddy had also passed, aged 86. That these two greats of American guitar were so close in age seems somehow surprising – a fact that, in itself, speaks of how far and fast guitar music evolved after 1957, when a 19-year-old Duane recorded his first hit *Moovin' n' Groovin*. Gretsch in hand, Duane became essentially the godfather of modern electric guitar before he was even in his 20s. The notes he played had a kind of straight-arrow authority that jumped out of the speaker and felt like the sonic equivalent of a firm handshake. The simplicity of his melodies was deceptive, however – the timing, the poise, the phrasing were perfect, each note disappearing into a mirage of reverb and tremolo like heat haze over tarmac.

We'll be paying full tribute to Duane next issue, but for now it's worth comparing the world of electric guitar that he ushered in with the one Dickey Betts inhabited, and made his own, just 11 years after Eddy's debut album landed, when he became one of the founding members of The Allman Brothers Band. By that time, the electric guitar didn't speak in the terse, twanging phrases of Duane's work – it wept, wailed and moaned. In what was inarguably Bett's best-known piece of work, *Jessica*, it also sang in harmony like a profane choir as it revelled in its own sense of limitless freedom. Two great players, two historic bodies of work separated by a narrow span of years but united by the guitar.

I wish that I could say that these masters and the riches of their musical legacy were the worst we lost this month – and surely that would be bad enough. Tragically, we also learned, with a sense of deep loss and shock, that our dear friend and colleague Nick Guppy, the expert voice of our amplifier coverage for so many years, had died unexpectedly. It would be impossible to think of a more knowing and passionate writer on amps than Nick, whose understated manner belied the strength of his highly informed opinions on tone and amp design (see obituary, page 46). I know he'll be as sorely missed by the readers of this mag as he is by everyone here at *Guitarist*. This issue is respectfully and affectionately dedicated to his memory.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

## Editor's Highlights

***Pablo van de Poel***
The ebullient Dutch guitarist behind the soulful retro-rock of DeWolff shows us his go-to Firebirds and a 'board brimming with fuzz pedals **p68**

***Cedric Burnside***
A latter-day exponent of the so-called 'hill country blues' of Mississippi, Cedric joins us to talk about his arresting new album on **p34**

***Spirit Of '57***
We join vintage restoration expert Huw Price as he lifts the hood on a 1957 Strat and embarks on the careful process of fettling it back to life **p118**

COVER: COVER IMAGE BY PHILIP BARKER ABOVE: PABLO VAN DE POEL BY ADAM GASSON; CEDRIC BURNSIDE IMAGE BY JIM ARBOGAST; '57 STRAT IMAGE BY HUW PRICE

# Guitarist

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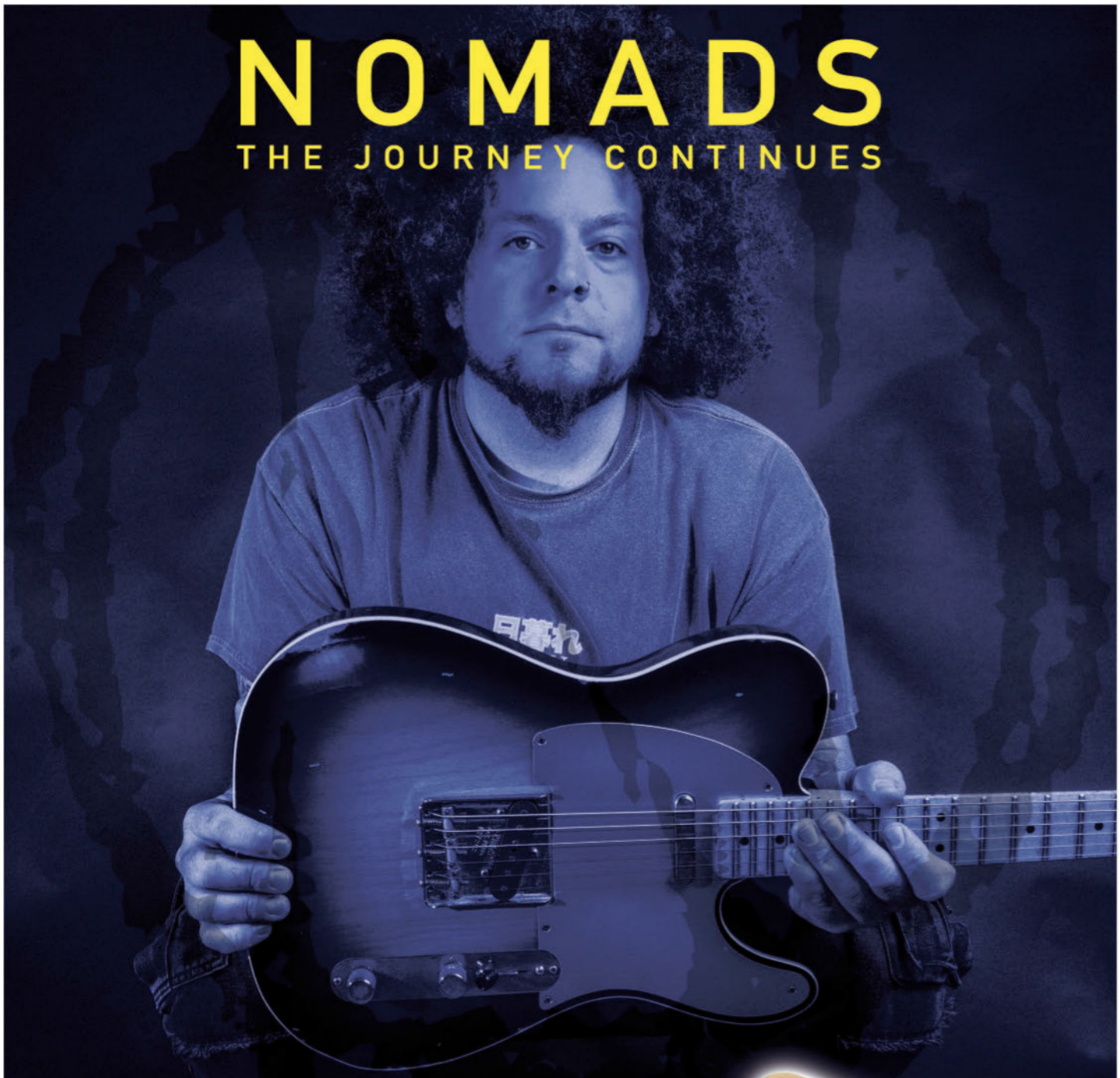

"I've always loved using Telecaster tones on my recordings. Nomads get super heavy without any unwanted spikiness but also respect the early '50s Tele tones for all the lower gain chime and spank that I love."

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To enjoy all of the video and audio content in this issue, type the following link into your browser and follow the instructions in the post entitled 'Guitarist video and audio': **http://bit.ly/guitaristextra**


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ISSUE 512
JULY 2024

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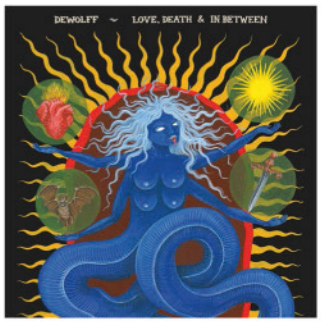


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(*Love, Death & In Between*)

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Rise Above It All (*Rise Above It All*)

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BLACK STONE CHERRY
When The Pain Comes
(*Screamin' At The Sky*)

TRACK #4
THE COLD STARES
Horse To Water
(*The Southern*)

TRACK #5
KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD
*Best Of Times*
(*Dirt On My Diamonds Vol 1*)

TRACK #6
QUINN SULLIVAN
*Half My Heart*
(*Salvation*)

TRACK #7
WALTER TROUT
*I've Had Enough (feat. Dee Snider)*
(*Broken*)

TRACK #8
ROBIN TROWER
*I'll Be Moving On*
(*Joyful Sky feat. Sari Schorr*)

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(*King Falcon*)

TRACK #10
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*Light It Up*
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**EPIPHONE**
**DAVE GROHL DG-335**
£1,249

**WHAT IS IT?** The first ever 'affordable' signature guitar for the Foo Fighters frontman

# The Colour & The Shape

Epiphone has delivered a cut-price replica of Dave Grohl's Trini Lopez-tinged DG-335. Let's see if it can punch above the logo

**Words** Stuart Williams **Photography** Phil Barker

Since Dave Grohl made his post-Nirvana debut with Foo Fighters in 1995, there have been multiple eras of his favoured onstage guitars, with the common thread being that they're more often than not an iteration of the classic Gibson dual-humbucker format – from the Les Paul Standards and Customs, Explorers and SGs, to the occasional Firebird. One of the few breaks in this chain came in the early Noughties around the band's fourth album, *One By One*, where he briefly became associated with his Ampeg Dan Armstrong, temporarily introducing a whole new generation to the revered see-through Lucite model before moving back to his familiar Gibsons.

In 2007 came the biggest constant for Grohl: the Gibson DG-335. It's this guitar that we've seen him playing most often – in fact, pretty much exclusively – since its introduction. Gibson issued it in a limited run of 200 the same year and it's subsequently seen further runs periodically since, including an all-black and a gold version. On the used market, these guitars command high prices (or, at

VOLUME
VOLUME
TONE

1. Grohl's prized guitar is his Trini Lopez Standard, and he's applied the diamond-shaped soundholes, split-diamond inlays and Firebird-style headstock to his own signature model. The Pelham Blue finish here is poly, not nitro

2. Grohl's Gibson model will set you back an arm and both legs (if you can find one), and while this 'affordable' signature model is still not cheap, it's the only guitar in either brand's line-up that delivers the combination of features Grohl fans will recognise

least, high asking prices), with current listings pushing upwards of £15k.

For those of us who can't drop part of a house deposit on a signature guitar, however, comes the Epiphone DG-335. First, there's a little more to the backstory of how an ES-335 came to be the backbone of one of the biggest rock bands in the world.

You might be aware that back in 1992 Dave Grohl was the drummer in another Biggest Band On The Planet. While on tour with Nirvana, he picked up a 1967 Gibson Trini Lopez Standard (Gibson also produced the fully-hollow Trini Lopez Deluxe, which was based on the Barney Kessel). The Standard was ES-335-like in design, but here the semi-hollow body featured diamond-shaped soundholes, split-diamond inlays, a six-in-a-line headstock similar to a Firebird, and the strings were anchored by a trapeze tailpiece, rather than a stopbar.

Grohl's Cherry Trini Lopez became, and remained, his go-to studio guitar. Indeed, when Lopez passed away in 2020, Grohl paid tribute to his unlikely inspiration

Tonally, this guitar is 'classic ES-335' with added firepower beyond what we'd normally get from Epiphone

saying, "Every album we have ever made, from the first to the latest, was recorded with my red 1967 Trini Lopez signature guitar. It is the sound of our band and my most prized possession from the day I bought it in 1992."

Why is this important? Well, it's this guitar that informs many of the distinctive features of Grohl's Gibson and now Epiphone signature model. The soundholes, inlays and headstock are all directly derived from the Trini Lopez Standard, and the Epiphone DG-335 is currently the only guitar in the Gibson stable to offer all of these in the Grohl configuration.

## Feel & Sounds

The body is made from layered maple/poplar and centre-blocked maple. A one-piece mahogany neck is glued on and fitted with a laurel fingerboard, rather than its Gibson counterpart's rosewood. Obviously, it's in the unmistakable Pelham Blue finish, but for the Epiphone version, the nitrocellulose finish gives way to polyurethane. Double-binding highlights the outline on both sides, the fingerboard and the soundholes. Of course, the six-in-a-line headstock is present and correct, stocked with Grover Mini Rotomatics, and to the back of the headstock sits the obligatory signature, which is also reproduced on the included hardcase.

But there's a pair of not-so-secret weapons fitted, too, and they account for nearly 25 per cent of the guitar's retail price: Gibson USA Burstbuckers. There's a Burstbucker 2 in the neck position, with a Burstbucker 3 at the bridge, both featuring Alnico II magnets, with the 2 being the 'mid-powered' model in the core trio of Burstbuckers, while the 3 is overwound and slightly hotter. In addition to this, Epiphone has beefed up the internals, with CTS pots, Mallory capacitors and a Switchcraft three-way selector. Keen-eyed Grohl fans will have already worked out that these are the same pickups that were fitted in the Gibson version, giving us the electronic firepower of a much pricier guitar.

Once the initial familiarity of the visual details has settled, the first thing you'll notice is the feel of the neck. It's what Epiphone calls an 'elliptical C' shape and it's exclusive to the DG-335. It's chunky, with a taste of a 50s-style profile, but without being quite so clubby, and to our hands it's quite different from that of, say, a common SlimTaper. In practice, it's a great-feeling all-rounder that leans towards Grohl's heartland rhythm playing, but it's also perfectly comfortable for playing lead lines further up the neck. It's worth noting that on a strap it does have a slight neck-heavy pull, but given the mostly empty body, it's to be expected.

**3.** The Epiphone version retains the full-fat model's six-in-a-line headstock with Grover Mini Rotomatics

**4.** Gibson and Epiphone have given us the meat and potatoes required to fill up on rock 'n' roll tone by including USA Burstbucker 2 and 3 pickups. These versatile units account for a hefty slice of the guitar's finished price

We're unlikely to get nitro on the non-Gibson version, of course, but the poly Pelham Blue finish is certainly eye-catching. Ours is flawless, along with the neatly executed binding offering more proof that Epiphone is attempting to turn the tide on past preconceptions

The Burstbuckers pay their way tonally, too. It's an acoustically vibrant guitar and that translates most through the neck pickup. Played clean, we get a piano-like response: attack, followed by a big woody, slightly bass-heavy sound. Under gain, open chords on the neck pickup can be a little woolly, but, conversely, this translates to thick lead sounds at the same setting. The bridge pickup has a much more 'studio' response, there's more honk and punch in the mids and less build up of lower frequencies, and we imagine this is where a lot of potential owners of this guitar will spend the majority of their time.

Foo Fighters guitar tones are hardly complex, but then simplicity is also arguably a place that provides little to no hiding places. We tried the DG through multiple valve amps, hardware modellers and plug-ins, and with a few tweaks of the gain and EQ, it was quick and easy to dial in sounds that were very close to the recordings.

In practice, the neck is a great-feeling all-rounder that leans towards Grohl's heartland rhythm playing

## Verdict

Signature guitars by their nature can be incredibly niche. If they're not, they run the risk of being a rebadged model with a lick of paint and a squiggle on the headstock. The DG-335 is, oddly, both. Visually, it's a Dave Grohl replica, but, tonally, it's 'classic ES-335' with added firepower beyond what we'd normally get from Epiphone, which happens to nail the sounds you'd expect. It's difficult to call a £1,250 guitar 'affordable', but relative to Grohl alternatives it is, and Epiphone has put the attention in where it counts with the Trini-style tweaks and those Burstbucker pickups.

Ironically, it's the electronics that push this guitar into the 'expensive for an Epiphone' territory, but we think that higher prices for import models is something we're all going to have to get used to from increasingly more brands. Brexit, wars, pirates and global inflation all take their toll, and this isn't the first time we've seen a £1,000-plus Epiphone, which still weighs in at under half the price of the most affordable current Gibson ES-335. It's simultaneously a signature guitar for the fans and a very respectable semi-hollowbody that will perform for every style you'd expect and more. G

## **EPIPHONE** DAVE GROHL DG-335

**PRICE:** £1,249 (inc. case)
**ORIGIN:** China
**TYPE:** Semi-hollowbody electric
**BODY:** Laminated maple/poplar
**NECK:** 1-piece mahogany with 6-in-line headstock
**SCALE LENGTH:** 628mm (24.75")
**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech, 43mm
**FINGERBOARD:** Laurel, with split-diamond inlays, 304.8mm (12") radius
**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo
**HARDWARE:** LockTone tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 50mm
**ELECTRICS:** Gibson Burstbucker 2 (neck) and Burstbucker 3 (bridge) pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone (CTS pots, Mallory capacitors), Switchcraft 3-position toggle pickup selector
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.71/8.2
**OPTIONS:** No
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Other Epiphone signatures include the Emily Wolfe Sheraton (£969), Noel Gallagher Riviera (£879) and Marty Schwartz ES-335 (£899). Standard models include the Inspired By Gibson Custom ES-355 (£1,199). Gibson's ES-335 Satin is £2,699
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No
**FINISH:** Pelham Blue

**Epiphone**
**www.epiphone.com**

**8/10**

**PROS** Look, playability and sound are exactly as you'd hope; capable of a lot more than Foo Fighters tones; the only guitar in the stable you'll find with these features

**CONS** Slightly headstock-heavy; a rosewood fingerboard would be nice at this price

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Bad Cat
JET BLACK
Bad Cat

**BAD CAT JET BLACK HEAD**
£1,999

**WHAT IS IT?** New design featuring two pretty special channels: one based on the Black Cat, the other with an extraordinary high-gain lead tone

# None More Black

## Bad Cat's new addition promises much, combining that classic signature sound with a unique new high-gain voicing

**Words** Nick Guppy **Photography** Phil Barker

Bad Cat Amplification is celebrating 25 years of manufacturing this year – no mean feat in the turbulent world of boutique amp production. Bad Cat was founded at the turn of the millennium to fill the gap left by the demise of Matchless and, in the early stages, there was some design help and assistance from Matchless founder, Mark Sampson. However, Sampson left soon after to explore new ventures as Bad Cat followed its own path, with innovations including the K Master volume control and popular new models including the Hot Cat and USA Player Series amplifiers.

Bad Cat relaunched last year with a new design team and a new range of products, including the critically acclaimed Black Cat, with the combo winning our Gold Award and going on to scoop the Gear Of The Year accolade. Here, we're looking at another new design that's already gained significant interest: the Jet Black.

True to its name, Bad Cat's Jet Black head has a 'none more black' design aesthetic, featuring a birch ply sleeve perfectly covered in heavy duty satin black vinyl, set off by shiny black front and rear control panels and smart black anodised aluminium control knobs. The electronics are contained within a tough aluminium chassis, which supports a pair of generously large custom-wound transformers with distinctive orange-end caps.

Inside the chassis, the circuits are built up on high-quality printed circuit boards, with one main board holding most of the components, including all the front-panel controls and preamp valve bases. Two smaller boards support the bases for the Jet Black's quartet of EL84 output valves and the rear-panel sockets. The minimal wiring is neatly twisted and routed to minimise hum, and the solder joints are all clean and bright.

The Jet Black is a two-channel design, with two sets of gain and master volume controls sharing a regular three-band EQ. There are Speed and Intensity controls for the tremolo effect, and a level control for the digital reverb.

On the rear panel, we see a selection of fixed impedance speaker outlets and a fixed level line out, with a buffered series effects loop and a jack socket for the supplied two-button footswitch, which changes channels and toggles the tremolo effect. Two small

1

2

1. The Jet Black features a high-quality Baltic birch ply sleeve surrounding an aluminium chassis, with that trademark illuminated logo badge also serving as a power indicator

2. There are two footswitchable channels with separate gain and master volume controls, making it easy to dial in your ideal rhythm and solo levels. There's a small toggle switch with an LED indicator, for when the footswitch isn't needed

toggle switches with LED markers on the front panel duplicate these functions for when the footswitch isn't needed.

The overall impression is one of top-drawer build quality, blended with Bad Cat's traditional styling and topped off with the trademark illuminated badge, which also serves as a power indicator.

## Sounds

We tried out the Jet Black with our PAF-loaded Les Paul and an American Standard Strat, together with a selection of stompboxes. It fires up with minimal hiss and hum, which is a good sign of a well-tuned circuit. Channel 1 is similar to the Black Cat, with pristine cleans, exceptional string separation and a smooth articulation that's a joy to play. This is the Bad Cat signature sound, which has found its way on to numerous gold and platinum albums over the years.

Channel 2 is wilder, with lots more gain and a vigorous, fast attack. It's not immediately recognisable as a legacy clone; there are elements of Tweed, early Marshall and Vox depending how you set the gain and EQ. However, the Jet Black has its own distinct voice and a fast, dynamic response that can be quite aggressive when needed.

The tremolo effect is nicely dialled in, too, with just the right range of speed and intensity to suit any genre, from slow pulsing Americana to stuttering punk and alt-rock. Meanwhile, the Jet Black's digital reverb adds a smooth halo to notes or chords, with no hint of splashiness or digital grain; it's just a really good reverb effect.

3. The Jet Black's warm, organic bias-controlled tremolo circuit is unique to Bad Cat, featuring controls for Intensity and Speed. The effect is footswitchable, and like the Channel switch it can also be operated from the front panel when needed

4. A clean-sounding buffered series effects loop is ideal for time-based effects, like delays and modulations

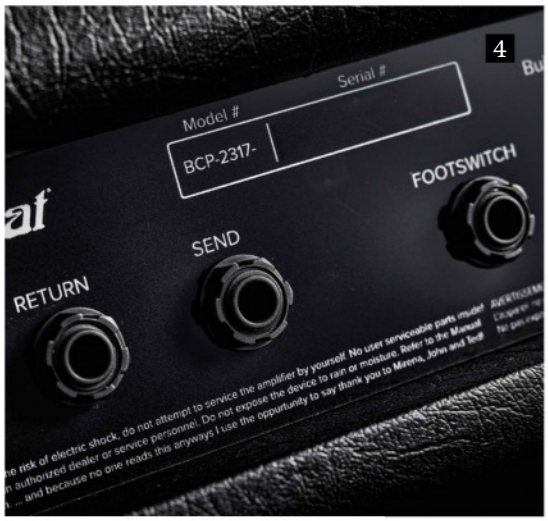
3

The best part of this amp for us is the remarkable touch-sensitive and aggressively toothsome lead tone of Channel 2

The buffered effects loop works well with delay and modulation effects, while other effects such as wahs, compressors and overdrives work equally well plugged into the single input jack. The Jet Black's three-band EQ works smoothly, too, with no annoying peaks and we found that no matter what guitar we used, the best tones always seem to happen with all three tone controls at or around the 12 o'clock position.

There's plenty of volume on tap for live gigs, especially when using the Jet Black's cathode-biased quartet of EL84s

5. You can hook up the fixed impedance speaker output sockets to most commonly available enclosures. Meanwhile, there's a fixed level line out that can be hooked up to bigger power amps or IR loaders as required



partnered up with the oversized 2x12 cab. This closed-back birch ply cabinet is a bit of a challenge to lug around but makes up for it in the volume and tone stakes, loaded with a pair of Celestion Vintage 30 speakers. It looks the part, too.

## Verdict

From the very beginning, Bad Cat amplifiers have had a reputation for great tone, but we think the brand's new range has raised the bar. The Jet Black's sparkling cleans and aggressive, punchy lead channel give it a lot of sonic versatility, especially if you team it with a decent overdrive pedal. Aimed at professionals and serious amateurs, admittedly it's far from cheap, but you're paying for one of the best-sounding USA amplifiers currently available, and it compares favourably to other high-end boutique products.

While the head is easy to carry around (there's a slightly smaller compact version that is a special order), the 2x12 cabinet partnered with the head for this review will be a challenge for those of us who aren't blessed with teams of roadies. Tipping the scales at around 33kg, it's definitely a two-person lift. We'd go for either the combo version or the size-matching 1x12 open-back cab, which just happens to be fitted with Celestion's G12-H30 Anniversary – one of our all-time favourite Celestion drivers.

The best part of this amp for us, though, is the remarkable touch-sensitive and aggressively toothsome lead tone of Channel 2, which barks like a Rottweiler when you dig in hard. It's a unique voice that will easily find its own niche in any guitar-based band and help create a signature sound for those lucky enough to own one. Definitely worth checking out.

## BAD CAT JET BLACK HEAD

**PRICE:** £1,999
**ORIGIN:** USA
**TYPE:** Valve preamp, valve power amp
**VALVES:** 3x 12AX7, 4 x EL84-R
**OUTPUT:** 38W RMS
**DIMENSIONS:** 527 (w) x 265 (d) x 255mm (h)
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 14/31
**CABINET:** Baltic birch ply
**CHANNELS:** 2, footswitchable clean and overdrive
**CONTROLS:** Volume 1, Master 1, Volume 2, Master 2. Treble, middle, bass. Tremolo intensity and speed, reverb level
**FOOTSWITCH:** 2-button footswitch (supplied) changes channels and toggles tremolo function
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Buffered series effects loop, bias-modulated tremolo, studio-quality digital reverb, fixed level line out
**OPTIONS:** None
**RANGE OPTIONS:** A special 25th Anniversary combo version in silver vinyl is available for £2,599, limited to 100 pieces worldwide. The standard combo costs £2,199. Speaker cabinet range includes a 1x12 Open-Back Compact w/ Celestion G12H Anniversary speaker (£799), and the following w/ Celestion Vintage 30 speakers: 2x12 Closed-Back (£1,199), 3x12 Closed-Back (£ 1,299) and 4x12 Closed-Black Slant Baffle (£1,399)

**Bad Cat Amps**
**www.badcatamps.com**

Guitarist CHOICE

**9/10**

**PROS** Typically well made; neatly executed traditional styling; top-drawer tone with the range to cover many musical genres; Channel 2's rock-intended, unique voice; reasonable price compared to other premium USA-made amps

**CONS** We'd like to see Bad Cat do more with the effects loop, maybe a footswitchable bypass

**ANCOATS GUITARS NEW ISLINGTON**
£1,900

**WHAT IS IT?** Lightweight, original retro-modern design bolt-on with 'Future Relic' finish

# Green Machine

Proudly made in Manchester, Ancoats' guitars mix up retro themes that stand out in the market. We take this third-generation New Islington for a spin

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

Ancoats' guitars are made by David Roberts in a converted shipping container in Pollard Yard, Manchester. "It was an old parking lot or something, but it now has around 130 shipping containers – just a lined empty container with patio doors on the front – and everyone's turned them into their own start-up businesses," David tells us. After attending an evening class at Merton College in London about a decade ago, before relocating to Manchester, David sold his first Ancoats guitar around three years ago and now splits his time as a radiographer and guitar maker 50/50.

The New Islington – which, like the brand, is also named after an area in Manchester – was David's first original design, and the guitar you see here is the recently upgraded version three. It's based on two of David's favourite guitars, a double-cut Gibson Les Paul Junior melded

1. A classy take on a time-honoured design, the New Islington sports dual-height Gotoh rear-locking tuners and a nicely cut nut

with some Rickenbacker style, but among his main inspirations are Matt Oram's Fidelity Guitars. "I don't think I'd be doing this without him," muses David. "He is kind of a trailblazer, one of the best independent guitar makers around."

It's certainly an original vision, but it's quite a flexible platform, too. For example, the base model comes with an ABM 3250

## The New Islington melds a double-cut Gibson Les Paul Junior with Rickenbacker style

2. This pair of Green Pickups' A Line single coils were designed for the New Islington. They're quite pokey with a measured DCR of just over 7kohms

hardtail through-strung bridge, while ours swaps that for the Göldo DG Shorty vibrato you see here (with a roller saddle bridge) that looks like it came off some 50s European build. And while David is yet another fan of lightweight obeche for the body, here you can swap that for swamp ash. There's also a choice of scale length, fingerboard radius, pickup style and a huge

colour choice from The Little Green Paint Company, also based in Manchester.

There's certainly an appealing retro vibe, not least the (optional) German carve around the top edges of the body, leaving the quite angular horns with just a small edge radius. The slab style is loaded with a three-piece cream plastic 'rocket-ship' pickguard. Its larger centre piece holds the two original-design A Line single coils, which are made by Green Pickups, another Mancunian enterprise, and the three large-knobbed rotary controls are rear mounted. There's thought and flair in the design, for sure.

Our sample uses a 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length, the bolt-on neck is roasted maple with a typically deep caramel colour, and the rosewood 'board is peppered with large brass ringed mother-of-pearl dots on the fingerboard edges either side of the dual 12th fret markers. Even the colour-matched headstock, a new six-in-a-line design, dares to be a little different with its relieved plastic-faced edge on the treble side.

**3.** This is a typically neat, efficient and smooth-actioned offset-style vibrato from Göldo. The bridge features roller saddles, too

**4.** Typical of the detail here, the neckplate is brushed aluminium with a smartly engraved 'A' logo. Previous New Islington models have been set-necks. The sprayed water-based finish is what Ancoats calls a 'Future Relic' – as the finish wears you'll see a different colour underneath!

This big-knobbed trio offers master volume and tone, while the centre control is a four-position rotary switch offering the extra series combination of both pickups

## Feel & Sounds

Stylistically, it might be a little different, but along with a nice weight of 2.69kg (5.92lb) it feels rather good seated or strapped on, very much in line with numerous modern makers, particularly here in the UK. The neck profile is quite a full-shouldered 'C' with a central flat back, and it feels a little bigger than it measures: 42.5mm wide at the nut, 20mm deep at the 1st fret and 22.6mm by the 12th. The fret gauge is good, too – a medium 2.65mm width and plenty of height at around 1.2mm. There's a little bit of fingerboard edge rolling that's always welcome, and while, to be critical, those fret ends could be a little rounder and smoother, it's a good overall player.

> Green Pickups is a new brand for us, and on this platform the A Line single coils come out shining

Green Pickups is a new brand for us, and on this platform the A Line single coils (designed to be an original take on a 'hot' Strat recipe with a central blade polepiece) come out shining. At the bridge we have a nicely twang-some Strat-y voice contrasted by good depth with clarity at the neck. The parallel mix certainly shouts Telecaster; the bigger series combination loses some definition but gives the New Islington a broad and pretty pokey fourth voice. There's a very good quality of sound here.

The vibrato adds some light offset-style shimmer, and once the strings have settled in there's good tuning stability, although that string tree on the top strings does seem to snag the high E occasionally.

## Verdict

With so many 'new' designs barely moving from the classics, there's plenty of retro-themed appeal here. There are a few minor quibbles, and unless you're into offset vibratos you could save some money with the standard, very good-quality ABM bridge that Ancoats offers. But what the New Islington lacks on a couple of easily sorted fine details, it certainly makes up for with a vibrant Fender-y voice, lightweight feel and original style, not to mention a welcome shout-out for Manchester craft. G

## ANCOATS GUITARS NEW ISLINGTON

**PRICE:** £1,900 (inc case)
**ORIGIN:** UK
**TYPE:** Double-cut bolt-on solidbody electric
**BODY:** Obeche
**NECK:** Roasted maple, medium 'C' profile, bolt-on
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/42.5mm
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, brass ringed mother of pearl dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo
**HARDWARE:** Göldo DG Shorty vibrato w/ roller saddle tune-o-matic-style bridge, Gotoh rear lock tuners with dual height posts
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 51mm
**ELECTRICS:** 2x Green A Line single coils, master volume, master tone, 4-way rotary pickup selector switch
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.69/5.92
**OPTIONS:** The New Islington starts at £1,650 with hardtail ABM bridge. The upgrade here is the vibrato (£250). Other options include scale length, pickup style and body wood (£POA)
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Offset NQ (from £1,650), plus custom orders
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes, same price
**FINISHES:** Jewel Beetle Green (as reviewed) from choice of 210 water-based colours – open-pore 'Future Relic' finish

**Ancoats Guitars**
**www.ancoatsguitars.co.uk**

**8/10**

**PROS** Inspired retro design with plenty of custom options; good voicing from single coils; series mix broadens the voices; good lightweight feel and playability

**CONS** A few details like fret ends and un-countersunk screws could be improved upon, but no major moans in the least

AVAILABLE NOW AT WWW.CREAMTCUSTOMSHOP.COM

Designed by Ted Newman-Jones & Keith Richards as the very first Newman® guitar, this 5 String "Open G" remains as innovative and unique today as it was when it was first conceived almost 5 decades ago. True to the original you can now acquire a genuine piece of guitar history. The Newman® 5 String is entirely UK made including its unique Cream T 5 string pickups. Experience one of the most inspiring ways to play the guitar since the guitar was first invented and appreciate first hand why Newman® guitars have been acclaimed by the likes of Keith Richards, Tom Petty, James Honeyman-Scott, Ron Wood, Billy F. Gibbons and many other A-listers of rock royalty.

**WALRUS AUDIO FUNDAMENTAL AMBIENT**
£125

**WHAT IS IT?** An ambient reverb pedal and the ninth in Walrus Audio's basic Fundamental series

1

2

# Easy Ambience

Walrus Audio adds ambient reverb to the basic building blocks of tone in its Fundamental pedal series

**Words** Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. The power socket is on the side of the pedal, rather than at the top with the I/O sockets where it would make more sense for saving pedalboard space

2. Yes, it's a bypass switch, but holding it down while powering up the pedal engages or disengages Trails mode. With Trails mode active, your reverb decay will fade away naturally after turning the pedal off

3. Sliders (rather than knobs) make it easy to adjust the parameters of the effect and see exactly what you've done. A notched centre-detente position provides a good average starting point for adjustments

We took a look at the Walrus Audio Fundamental series last year when the company released eight pedals simultaneously, all designed for affordability and ease of use and each covering a specific effects type: Drive, Distortion, Fuzz, Tremolo, Chorus, Phaser, Delay and Reverb. At the time, we wondered whether a flanger would follow, but, in fact, Walrus has actually gone with an ambient reverb pedal for the next release – perhaps not surprising as the brand has form in that area with the likes of the Slöer and several others.

The new pedal offers three different atmospheric reverb algorithms – Deep, Lush and Haze – chosen from a front-panel switch. The sound can then be dialled in with centre-detented sliders that set the reverb mix (from 100 per cent dry to 100 per cent wet), and the length of the decay from a relatively short stab through to a long lingering tail. A Tone slider shifts the overall tonality of the reverb in a different way depending on what algorithm is selected, but as a general rule offers a range from woolly and subdued to bright and spanky.

All three sounds provide shifting clouds of textured reverb, but each is sufficiently different to justify its inclusion. Deep delivers reverb with added low-octave flavour that manifests itself in murky depths, while Lush is exactly that with a silky more open sound, less dense in the lower-mids and characterised by a really long sustained tail; with the decay slider at max, it seems to go on indefinitely.

For both of these algorithms the Tone knob controls the cut-off of a synth-style low-pass filter, ripe to be manipulated for effect as the reverb tail plays out, as perhaps it is for the resonant band-pass filtering it provides for the more lo-fi vibe of the Haze algorithm. With this one, Walrus Audio has used distortion and sample rate reduction to deliver grainy texture in a dense wall of sound with plenty of tonal variation available.

## Verdict

While the Fundamental Reverb covered the conventional staples – with Hall, Spring and Plate 'verbs – the Ambient is its quirky twin, covering more esoteric territory. Its sounds may not be universally applicable, but those looking for expansive soundscapes and lingering background pads with long decay times will find plenty of variation on that theme here, all instantly easy to dial in and neatly presented in a conveniently sized footprint at a pretty decent price.

## WALRUS AUDIO FUNDAMENTAL AMBIENT

**PRICE:** £125
**ORIGIN:** USA
**TYPE:** Ambient reverb pedal
**FEATURES:** Buffered bypass, switchable Trails mode, choice of 3 algorithms
**CONTROLS:** Decay, Tone, Mix, Deep/Lush/Haze switch, Bypass footswitch
**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output
**POWER:** 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 100mA
**DIMENSIONS:** 60 (w) x 116 (d) x 56mm (h)

**FACE bvba**
**+32 3 844 67 97**
**www.walrusaudio.com**

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

**PROS** Compact size; three distinct sounds; ergonomic slider interface; Trails mode; long pad-like reverbs

**CONS** Power socket placement

## THE RIVALS

If you want more than the outright simplicity of the Fundamental series and have a bit more to spend, check out Walrus's Slöer Stereo Ambient Reverb (£339). On a tighter budget or have less 'board space? Try the Mooer A7 Mini Ambience Pedal (£89) with seven different reverb effects "catering to the far-out guitar astronauts and the psychedelic space cadets", says the brand. Strymon is known for its large BigSky (£469) and NightSky (£399) reverbs, but it also has the smaller Cloudburst Ambient Reverb (£269), which combines ambience processing with an Ensemble engine for creating pads and soundscapes.

Strymon's Cloudburst is a smaller alternative to the BigSky and NightSky

**DONNER/THIRD MAN HARDWARE TRIPLE THREAT**
£95

**WHAT IS IT?** Multi-effects pedal designed by Third Man Hardware and the China-based Donner brand

# Three's A Charm

Jack White's Third Man Hardware has created a three-effect powerhouse in collaboration with budget brand Donner

**Words** Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. Our loaned model is in yellow and is a slightly more expensive limited-edition that's apparently already sold out, but the standard black version with yellow legending looks equally as good
2. The knobs each have a nicely tactile rubber outer ring, but they are tiny so may feel a little fiddly to operate if you have larger fingers
3. The Distortion Vol and Phaser Level knobs both set output volume so can be combined for an overall level or to set a boost. The Echo Level knob is a dry/wet mix

Jack White has got involved in pedal design before via his Third Man Hardware brand, having previously worked with CopperSound and MXR among others, but this time he's teamed up with budget Chinese company Donner. Enamoured of its Alpha range, Jack felt that the company would be ideal for creating "something very cool that was not going to break the bank for a beginning musician". The result is the Triple Threat, a solidly built multi-effects pedal that starts with a distortion, followed by a phaser and a delay, all for less than £100 for the Black edition.

The effects are based on some earlier Donner pedals, but these have upgraded circuit design and tonal qualities dialled in to Jack's specifications. The Distortion has a flexible range, starting from crunchy drive and culminating in a rich high-gain sound that has plenty of sustain but retains good string articulation. All this is tempered by the Tone knob, which really puts the top-end presence where you need it to be.

The Phaser is also wide ranging in that you get a Depth as well as a Rate control; it'll do classic 1970s phasing and some rotary stylings. Then the Echo knob offers a range of the most practical delay times from a cool slapback upwards, with repeats that have an analogue sound with a measured degree of degradation as they fade away. It's also a knob manipulator's delight that will take off into self-oscillation. Between the three, there are loads of tones just waiting to be dialled in.

## Verdict

In the world of modern effects, you don't get much for £95, so having three solid performers in one package is great value. In many respects the Triple Threat could be an ideal beginner's effect pedal, as planned. Our view is that a dirt pedal and a delay are the two essential pedals for guitarists to have and are amply covered here along with a decent dose of modulation if you want it.

What's more, it has a single power supply, so there's no messing with patch leads, and instant hands-on results, rather than the tedium and option paralysis of diving into a digital menu. But the sounds here are fine for any guitar player: beginner, advanced or even pro. It provides enough to function as your only pedalboard or as a great 'get-out-of-jail' standby for your regular gear – a fly rig that'll slip easily into a guitar case, gigbag or coat pocket.

## DONNER/THIRD MAN HARDWARE TRIPLE THREAT

**PRICE:** £95
**ORIGIN:** China
**TYPE:** Multi-effects pedal
**FEATURES:** Buffered bypass
**CONTROLS:** Echo Level, Echo Feedback, Echo Time, Phaser Level, Phaser Rate, Phaser Depth, Distortion Volume, Distortion Gain, Distortion Tone, Echo footswitch, Phaser footswitch, Distortion footswitch
**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output
**POWER:** Supplied 9V DC adaptor 45mA
**DIMENSIONS:** 196 (w) x 64 (d) x 45mm (h)

**Donner/Third Man Records**
**https://uk.donnermusic.com**
**https://thirdmanstore.co.uk**

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

**PROS** Compact size; affordable; cool graphics; good combination of good-sounding effects

**CONS** Some players may prefer a different modulation choice, maybe chorus or tremolo; control knobs are very small

## THE RIVALS

The Triple Threat puts us in mind of the Tech 21 Fly Rig, the latest version being the Fly Rig 5 (£399), which packs reverb, delay, distortion and boost as well as amp sim and tuner – it is four times the price, though! The Mooer Red Truck (£229) has a similar vibe, while the TC Electronics Plethora X3 (£309) offers versatility in a three-switcher pedal. For something more comparable in price and sizing, check out the Valeton Dapper Indie (£99) and the Valeton Dapper Mini (£69), which has the most similar format to the Triple Threat with footswitched drive, chorus and delay.

TC Electronics' triple-footswitch Plethora X3 is a versatile option

THE LINEUP

# Gas Supply

**Our pick** of the month's most delectable and wallet-bothering new gear

## New Releases From £189

CONTACT **Various** WEB **See below**

This month's new gear releases reveal the continuation of a few emerging trends in different areas, from rockers turning to the full heft of a semi-hollow (see also the Epiphone Dave Grohl DG-335 and EVH SA-126 models), to single-pickup UK-made guitars, studio-style compression and even the second doubleneck we've seen in 2024! Effects wise, we're getting another 'chameleon' pedal thanks to IK Multimedia, meaning we can have even more flexibility on our 'boards without having to rearrange our existing pedals. **[SW]**

**WALRUS AUDIO** MONUMENTAL HARMONIC STEREO TREMOLO **£269**

We're not sure when the fine folk at Walrus find time to sleep, but we're glad they appear to be forsaking the shuteye. The latest pedal for us to get our tusks into is the Monumental Harmonic Stereo Tremolo.

This new pedal offers the same Fender-style harmonic tremolo mode as its sibling, the Monument, but now with the ability to save three presets within the pedal. It can also operate in 'standard' tremolo mode, or blend between the two with six waveshapes on offer, and Walrus has added a pan control and additional sub-division options. It comes in black or orange versions.

**www.walrusaudio.com**

**FENDER** TOM DELONGE STARCASTER **£1,149**

Blink-182 fans were overjoyed to see Tom DeLonge's Strat revived last year, and now Fender has gone a step further with the Tom DeLonge Starcaster.

Tom's take on Fender's offset semi-hollow guitar shrinks the headstock to a more practical Strat size. Elsewhere, it includes a centre-blocked, laminated maple body, roasted maple neck with rosewood fingerboard, and it keeps things minimal with a single Seymour Duncan SH-5 wired to a lone volume control, with treble bleed circuit.

It's available in four finishes: Seafoam Green and Shoreline Gold with chrome hardware, and Shell Pink and Olympic White with black hardware.

**www.fender.com**

**ORIGIN EFFECTS** CALI76 **£309**

Origin Effects partially made its name off the back of its Cali76 compressor pedals, and now it's back with the Cali76 FET and Cali76 Bass Compressor.

Based on the classic Urei 1176 studio compressor, known for its fast, aggressive compression sounds, the Cali76 features all-analogue circuitry with increased internal voltage for additional headroom, paired with a comprehensive set of controls to fine-tune your squeeze settings. There are Attack, Release and Ratio knobs, as well as input/output levels and a Dry blend for parallel compression. And you can see exactly how much gain reduction you're applying via a 10-segment LED meter.

**www.origineffects.com**

**PJD** APPRENTICE **£899**

One company with an eye on the cost-of-living crisis is York-based PJD Guitars. Last year the brand reconfigured its Standard series to start at £1,299, and the team has now announced a new version of its stripped-down Apprentice, offered as direct-only at just £899, including gigbag.

It follows the spec of the Standard with lightweight obeche body, proper bolt-on neck with rosewood fingerboard, and comes in limited vintage Porsche open-pore colours. You get the same top-line Gotoh hardtail bridge and tuners, plus a single PJD Wadfather humbucker with single volume control. It'll be available in both the pictured St John offset style as well as the single-cut Carey format.

**www.pjdguitars.com**

**DANELECTRO** 6-12 **£1,199**
Could doubleneck guitars be the next big trend? At 39.5 times cheaper than Gibson's recent Collector's Edition Jimmy Page model, the Danelectro 6-12 is a six- and 12-string Shorthorn rolled into one. Both necks have a 635mm (25-inch) scale length with 21-fret rosewood fingerboards, and each side of the guitar is served with a pair of lipstick single coils and stacked volume/tone controls. You can switch between the configurations via a toggle switch, and there's a global three-way pickup selector. It comes in Limited Edition White Pearl. Make ours a double!
**www.jhs.co.uk**

# ALSO RELEASED

**GIBSON** SLASH 'JESSICA' LES PAUL STANDARD £2,999

If there's one thing we know about Slash, it's that he's partial to a Les Paul. Here, the top-hatted snake charmer has teamed up with Gibson for the latest guitar in his signature collection, a Les Paul Standard replication of the guitar he refers to as 'Jessica'.

The original is a factory version Slash received from Gibson in the late 80s and it's gone on to become his most-used stage guitar. The production version has a non-weight-relieved mahogany body, capped with a three-piece maple top, a mahogany neck with a 50s profile, and Custom Burstbucker Alnico 2 pickups. It's finished in gloss Honey Burst and comes in a Gibson hard case with a Slash pick tin and USA strap.
**www.gibson.com**

**IK MULTIMEDIA** TONEX ONE £189

IK Multimedia has taken its innovative ToneX amp, boost, drive and fuzz models and packed them into a tiny pedal. The ToneX One can be any one of IK's 200 included premium Tone Models, with up to 20 stored within the pedal. You can seamlessly hop between two of the presets via the footswitch's A/B selector, or use it as a single pedal in Stomp mode.

Control wise, there are three dual-duty mini-pots for three-band EQ/gate, compression and reverb – and, this being IK Multimedia, the ToneX one is also equipped with a USB 3 audio interface.
**www.ikmultimedia.com**

# Fretbuzz

A monthly look at must-hear artists from all corners of the guitar world, from the roots of their sound to the tracks that matter most

## Artist: Sophie Giuliani

Soloing masterclasses: Pickup Music

PHOTO BY NICOLE DITT

Still in her early 20s, Sophie has played with an enviable list of artists, including pop sensation Olivia Rodrigo **www.facebook.com/sophiegiulianimusic**

Sophie had session guitar work in her sights in her teens, researching teaching facilities in the States all the way from her native Australia

Australian-born and Los Angeles-based Sophie Giuliani is a 23-year-old session guitarist of high order, having played with Olivia Rodrigo, Empress Of and Mayer Hawthorne among others, and she recently took to the Coachella stage with R&B pop artist Thuy. She is also a popular online guitar tutor (check out her Pickup Music masterclass). But her route to guitar playing took some surprising turns. "My interest in music came from ballet," Sophie explains. "I hated it and was more interested in the music being played, so then I did a hip-hop class. But once I started playing guitar I knew it was something I really wanted to do."

### Coming To America

Sophie didn't hang about – by the time high school hit in Victoria, Australia, she was already thinking ahead. "By 14 or 15, I was looking into schools in the US," she says. "With social media these days, there was already a community of players and I was watching people who study at Berklee and Musicians Institute, so I already had the dream of coming to America, that idea was circulating. And then I watched the whole John Mayer thing and saw that he went to Berklee..." She stops and laughs: "It was only for [a few] months, so maybe you can't count that. But all the way through high school I was trying to get as good as possible to make an opportunity."

PHOTO BY NICOLE DITT © 2024 DITTPHOTO

### The Journey

This drive has seen Sophie good with her now being established in LA, and her musical journey matches miles travelled. "The first guitarist I knew was Slash," she says, "but then someone gifted me the *Crossroads* video in 2011, and that's when I discovered how much of a blues guitarist John Mayer was and I was just like, 'What is happening?' That opened up so much for me; it opened my mind to Stevie Ray Vaughan and BB King and all the Kings. But I grew up listening to Van Halen, Clapton and Def Leppard – and Prince is one of my all time favourite guitarists. And then in my teens I went down the jazz rabbit hole, although I'm nowhere close to being a jazz player!"

### In Session

Sophie is predominantly a session guitarist, a demanding practice that requires a broad spectrum of musical knowledge. "The range of music I've had to play in the last year is so vast," she says. "As a session musician, [listening has] helped me a lot getting gigs in different styles. And I think each phase has helped me really home in on whatever the artist is needing. For me, it helps me understand a vision and it's easy when somebody makes a reference and you've gone down that road before and you can hear what they're asking.

"A lot of the time, communication in music is referencing artists and music of a certain time," she explains. "If someone asks you to give them Prince comping on little voicings, if you haven't listened, how can you know what they're talking about?"

### Stage Management

By its nature, the role of session musician is seen from a different angle – a support act to the main character on stage or in the studio. "I don't like being centre stage," Sophie admits. "I enjoy being behind; I'm a bit of a wallflower and I feel comfortable being on stage, playing someone's music and being excited about bringing that artist's project to life. I love being part of a team and I'd feel a little afraid if the focus was all on me! I'd love to sit in and watch the players in Nashville do their thing," she continues. "I've seen people get jealous of others who are better than them, but I want to play with the best people. I want to learn!" **[GK]**

**Standout work:** Olivia Rodrigo BBC Radio 1 *Live Lounge*
**For fans of:** John Mayer, Joe Bonamassa, Susan Tedeschi

"I don't like being centre stage. I feel comfortable being on stage, bringing an artist's project to life"

## GO-TO GEAR

### The Korean guitar that suits Sophie to a T

Sophie's number one guitar is a T-style from a lesser known brand. "My go-to is the Willows Spinster," she tells us. "They're a really small brand from South Korea and I was super shocked when they reached out; it's the most incredible guitar. As soon as I opened the case I could see the attention to detail with the frets and the paint. It's my most versatile guitar: it has two Kloppmann humbuckers that are split, with a six-way switching system."

Elsewhere, you'll often see Sophie rocking a Gibson Custom Shop 1964 ES-335 Reissue and PRS Silver Sky, with the pedal-loving Two-Rock Traditional Clean amplifier and a selection of stompboxes: Vemuram Jan Ray and Cornerstone Gladio overdrives, Walrus Audio's Julianna chorus/vibrato and Mako Series D1 delay, plus the Origin Effects Cali76 compressor.

PHOTO BY NICOLE DITT©2024 DITTPHOTO

THE LINEUP

# Albums

**The month's best guitar music** – a hand-picked selection of the finest fretwork on wax

Introspective yet warmly emotive, Richard Hawley's new album is a standout

PHOTO BY DEAN CHALKLEY

## Richard Hawley

### In This City They Call You Love

**BMG (release date: 31 May)**

**9/10**

**Sublime songcraft from Sheffield's laureate of the lonesome**

Inspired by a random remark he heard a visitor to his home city of Sheffield make, *In This City They Call You Love* is one of Richard Hawley's finest albums to date – and that's saying something. The quality of his songcraft has been both remarkable and remarkably constant across the past 23 years of his post-Longpigs solo career. If you imagine a jukebox in a 60s cafe with a row of Norton motorcycles parked outside, you'll have an idea of Hawley's musical touchstones – everything from Johnny Kidd & The Pirates to The Everly Brothers. Yet for all that, Hawley does not seem a man imprisoned by his influences; he is simply comfortably at home among them.

The ballad *Hear That Lonesome Whistle Blow* is the kind of song Johnny Cash or Willie Nelson might have written – simple and shot straight at the heart, Hawley's 1950 J-200 playing soft and low. Rocker *Deep Space* sees him let fly with cranked amps and junk-store fuzz as he sings, 'Oh my God, what have we done / turned our backs upon the sun' – a line both apocalyptic and grittily real, the song detonating from the speakers. The next track, *Deep Waters*, goes the opposite way – Hawley seems almost to be strumming alone in an empty bar as he sings, 'It's time that I should find where I'm forgiven / it's time that I be all that I can be.' However, on the evidence of this wonderfully honest, intimate album, he's already there. **[JD]**

**Standout track:** *Deep Waters*
**For fans of:** The Everly Brothers, Scott Walker, Elvis

## Kavus Torabi

### The Banishing

**Believer's Roast (available now)**

**9/10**

**Gong frontman finds solace in emotional exile**

During the pandemic, a lot of people found lockdown very difficult. For Gong frontman Kavus Torabi it led to a period of traumatic upheaval in his personal life. With *The Banishing*, Kavus has turned the psychological fallout from that crisis into a rather beautiful album whose dark corners are illuminated by a kind of esoteric optimism. Opener, *The Horizontal Man*, places bleak colours on the canvas, its sparse dulcimer-like melody like drips of frigid water from an icicle. If that song represents the fall, the rest of the album follows Kavus on a long climb towards daylight again. *Snake Humanis* is a lovely track, reminiscent of Robyn Hitchcock in its artless, lysergic wit and Kavus plays a gem of a solo in it, too. Meanwhile, poignant *Push The Faders* invites us to stand beside him on the front lawn of his heart, watching the house burn down. Psychedelic albums often engage the imagination of the listener – less often the emotions. With *The Banishing*, Torabi has made a more complete, unflinching piece of art than most psychonauts ever attempt. **[JD]**

**Standout track:** *Push The Faders*
**For fans of:** Robyn Hitchcock, Robert Wyatt, Gong

## Tinsley Ellis

### The Naked Truth

**Alligator Records (available now)**

**8/10**

**Acoustic blues that echoes the greats**

If you're a fan of acoustic folk blues in the style of Muddy Waters, Skip James, Robert Johnson and Son House, Tinsley Ellis's new album will surely appeal. Tinsley brings his own style to the genre, with a rounded vocal tone and wonderful fingerpicking chops. It's a stripped-down presentation, not like his usual full electric band sound, with propulsive guitar dynamics and rhythmic leanings strongly played. The picking/slide drive of *Devil In The Room* is ear-catchingly good, while *Windowpane* sounds like he's playing in the same room as you. Tinsley makes Son House's *Death Letter Blues* sound both new and old, and the instrumental *Silver Mountain* has a strummy acoustic Jimmy Page flavour with an evocative 60s Californian optimism. Nice! **[JS]**

**Standout track:** *Death Letter Blues*
**For fans of:** Skip James, Muddy Waters

Joanne Shaw Taylor lays down the soul on her latest record

PHOTO BY STACIE HUCKEBA

## Joanne Shaw Taylor
Heavy Soul
**Journeyman Records (release date: 7 June)**

**8/10**

**Blues rocker delivers soul-driven new album**

Joanne Shaw Taylor powers her way through 10 tracks, fired up by her soulful voice and electrifying guitar playing. Produced by longtime Bonamassa collaborator Kevin Shirley and released on Jobo's Journeyman label, *Heavy Soul* opens with *Sweet 'Lil Lies*, which finds JST set the pace with blues rock intensity. *All The Way From America* is an acoustic-driven crowd pleaser with a catchy chorus, while *Black Magic* dives deeper into soul territory. *Drowning In A Sea Of Love* features an outstanding guitar solo, every note underlining the song's heartfelt lyrics. "It was about connecting the dots from [previous album] *Nobody's Fool* back into the blues... It's a mix of contemporary soul-pop and roots music," she says. And we couldn't agree more. With a list of accompanying musicians, including Anton Fig, Alison Presswood and Rob McNelley, the album doesn't put a foot wrong. **[DM]**

**Standout track:** *Devil In Me*
**For fans of:** Bonnie Raitt, Joe Bonamassa

## Pat Metheny
MoonDial
**BMG (release date: 26 July)**

**10/10**

**Grammy-laden jazz superstar releases baritone acoustic album**

In much the same channel as Metheny's outstanding solo acoustic releases *One Quiet Night* (2003) and *What It's All About* (2011) comes *MoonDial*. But this time the featured guitar is a very special Linda Manzer-built baritone nylon-string. Manzer was responsible for Meheny's famous multi-string 'Picasso' and, judging from the majestic tone here, the instrument has reached exactly the right player. It's easy to run out of adjectives when describing Metheny's jazz sensibility; he has a rare sense of melodic virtue and nowhere is that more evident than here. Recorded live in the studio with no overdubs, the effect is mesmerising, with tracks like *La Crosse* and *You're Everything* weaving considerable magic. There's even room for a spellbinding rendition of Paul McCartney's *Here, There And Everywhere*. Make no mistake, this is a master at work. Watch out for two UK dates this November. **[DM]**

**Standout track:** *We Can't See It, But It's There*
**For fans of:** Martin Taylor, George Van Eps

THE LINEUP

# Tones Behind The Tracks

**Cedric Burnside** learnt at the knee of his fabled grandfather, but his latest album is a hill country blues masterclass on his own terms

## Artist: Cedric Burnside

Album: Hill Country Love (Provogue/Mascot)

*Hill Country Love* is the follow-up to Cedric Burnside's 2021 Grammy-winning *I Be Trying* album

To those familiar with Mississippi's distinct strain of hill country blues, Burnside is a name that carries weight. The big bang that started it all was the late RL, whose hypnotic grooves were the stuff of cult legend for more than half a century. But of the Burnside progeny keeping the hill country sound alive, few are rising faster than 45-year-old Cedric, who now follows 2021's Grammy-winning *I Be Trying* with latest studio album, *Hill Country Love*. "To God be the glory," he demurs, modestly, of this acclaimed new release, but the propulsive pulse of his guitar work surely deserves credit, too.

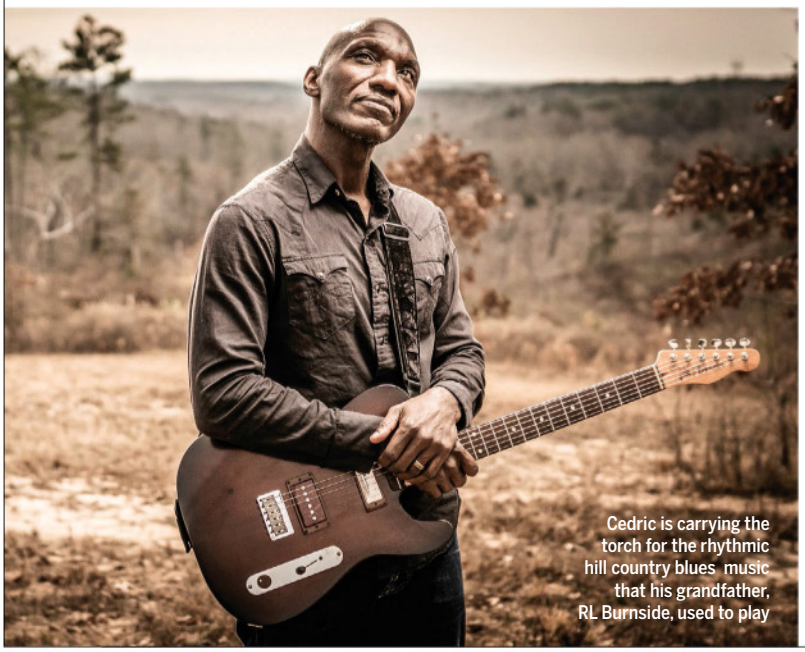
**For the benefit of anyone who is so far uninitiated in Mississippi's hill country blues, what characterises the sound of that sub-genre for you?**

"Well, for one, to me, I think it's really about the unorthodox rhythm of hill country blues. It sounds way different than any other blues that you might listen to. I'm from the little town of Tullahoma and the music in this area is just something all of its own. It's kinda hard to explain. It's really hard to even put it down on paper. Most music you can read off paper, but with hill country blues, I think it's kinda impossible to even try to write it or read it. My big daddy [Cedric's grandfather, RL Burnside] used to call it 'field music' and that's because those cats just played a good guitar, and they played it from their heart. Sometimes there wasn't any changes, y'know? And then sometimes they might put a change in there. But you don't hear the 'I-IV-V' in hill country blues, hardly any."

**Can you tell us how your family connection with RL has fed into your own music?**

"Growing up with my big daddy, I watched him and heard him play all the time as a little kid. From six or seven years old, I'd watch him practise on the front porch, in the front room and at the house parties he used to throw all the time. So that stuck with me. I'm just one of many grandchildren that witnessed this, but I think I'm one of the grandkids that was [most] amazed when I heard him play. I would always sit there and just be in amazement. And I would always tell myself, even as a little kid, 'I am gonna play this music.'

"It means a lot to me, this music. It means a lot to me to keep it going. And to leave a legacy of my own. But my big daddy, he opened the door for the Burnside family. All those years playing with him, he inspired me, taught me how to travel the world, showed me great musicianship. And as I play my music, I think of him. Even though this is modern music and modern songs, it tends to sound a little old-school also, because that's where my heart is at and I just love that sound."



Cedric is carrying the torch for the rhythmic hill country blues music that his grandfather, RL Burnside, used to play

PHOTO BY JIM ARBOGAST

**Is hill country blues still booming in your region – or is it your mission to shine the spotlight on a genre that is something of a lost artform?**

"It's still thriving. I have a very musical family. My big daddy and big mama – RL and Alice – they had 13 children. Eight of them was boys, and five out of the eight played music. A few has gone on to be with the Lord, but there's still some here, like Garry Burnside and my uncle Duwayne Burnside. Junior Kimbrough was another great hill country artist – his music is known for the cotton patch soul blues sound, but he's from the area – and his family is keeping it alive, too. Y'know, Robert Kimbrough and Kenny Kimbrough, and he also has a grandson by the name of Cameron Kimbrough. It's very vibrant here, and it's gonna continue. Hopefully after us, we'll have another generation ready to keep it going."

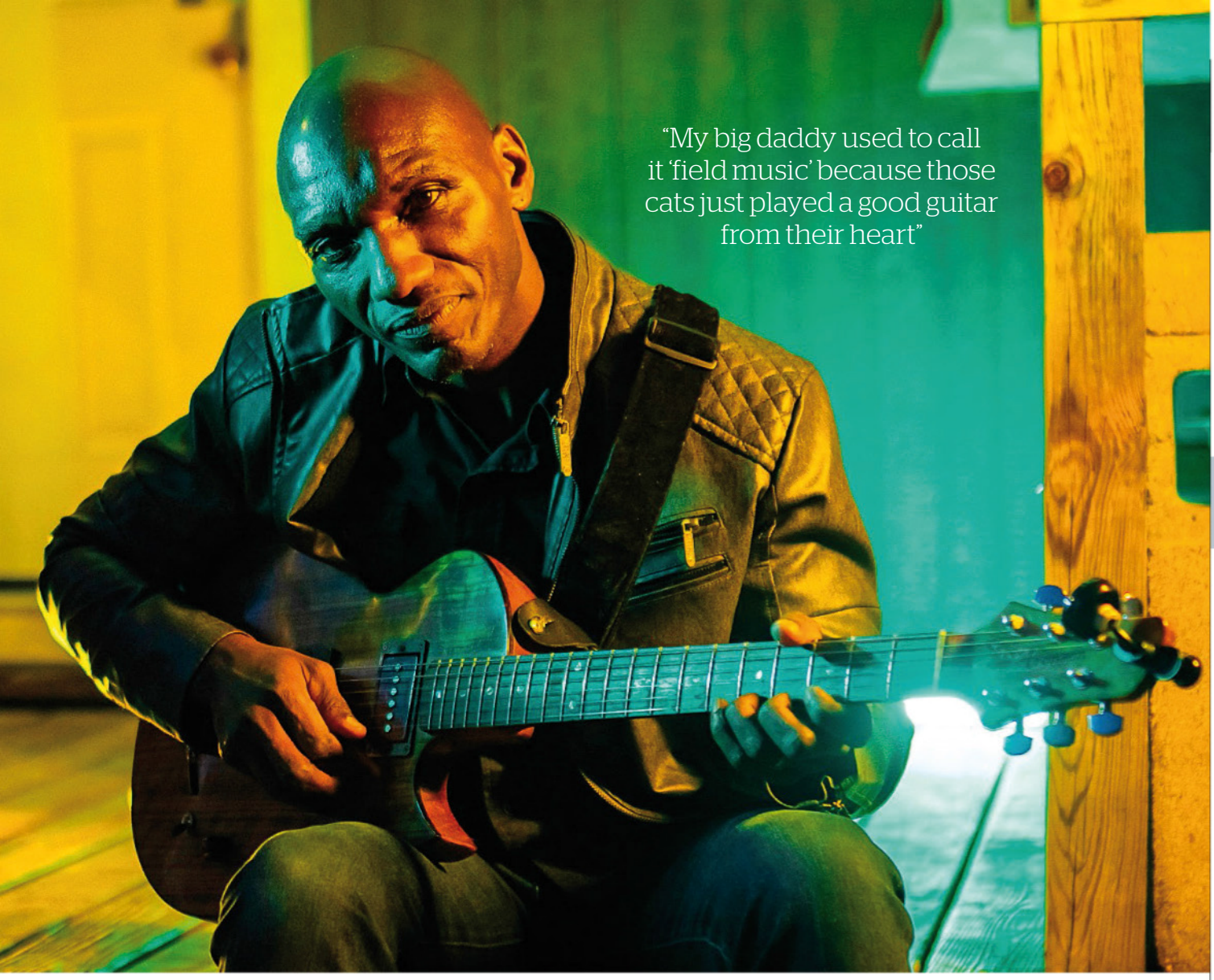



PHOTO BY JIM ARBOGAST

### What's your approach to the guitar when playing this particular style of blues?

"I like to keep it simple, as my granddad did. He didn't use any pedals. I got one pedal, and it's an A/B pedal, just a splitter. And then I have an EarthQuaker tuner pedal. That's just about it. I play through two amps – a Fender Tone Master Twin Reverb and an Ampeg bass amp – so I use the A/B pedal to just split 'em off so the lows can come out of the bass amp and the highs from the lead amp. That's pretty much it, man. And then I just blast it. I just turn my amp up as loud as I can, and if I need a little bit more, I turn my guitar up. So it's really just a simple approach for me.

"It don't take much for the songs I write. Y'know, I just write 'em from the heart, and with my guitar playing I really play what sounds good to me. I use open G a lot, but standard tuning as well. Sometimes I might come up with a guitar riff and no lyrics. Other times I might have three songs written and then I have to find good guitar riffs for them."

### What guitars did you use on the album?

"I got a friend named Mike Aronson of Aronson Custom Guitars. He's from a town called Blacksburg, Virginia. It's really crazy. He was a [radiologist] for over 30 years – I think he just retired two years ago – but he always built guitars for a hobby. He built me a guitar based off a Les Paul style, and I forget the exact name of the pickups, but they're similar to P-90s. He did another for me based on a Telecaster: he found the wood and he crafted that guitar for me, too. Also, last year, I bought a Gretsch G9221 resonator, and the acoustic songs that you hear on *Hill Country Love*, two of those were done with that resonator. Martin also gave me a 15M acoustic a few years ago."

Cedric's LP-style single-cut is a custom model made by Mike Aronson, a radiologist-turned-luthier from Virginia. It features on the album alongside his T-style guitar (opposite), another custom Aronson build

### What are your plans for touring the new album around the world?

"My booking agent is working on a European tour right now. I'm hoping to be over there between the fall and winter. Look out for me! I'm definitely touring the States – I'm booked up here all the way until September."

### What are your criteria for deciding that a song is done and ready for the album?

"I try to be true to myself before I even start. I like to speak the truth in my songs – even though at times the truth can be a little harsh or embarrassing. And when I write a song, I like to structure it in a specific way. So if I'm talking about hardship, y'know, I want to make sure I get the message across. Sometimes it might be a short message, sometimes a little longer. It could be a five-minute song, a three-minute song or a two-minute song. But when I feel in my heart that I got my message across, then the song is finished." **[JD/HY]**

*Hill Country Love* by Cedric Burnside is out now on Provogue/Mascot

***www.cedricburnside.net***

NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

# Boogie Wonderland

**Neville Marten** doesn't currently have a guitar amp, but that's about to change as he awaits the arrival of a refurbished Boogie Mark I Reissue

As you will know if you follow my scribblings in this tome, for the past five years or so I've been using digital systems for my main gig – first a Line 6 Helix and lately a Blackstar Amped 2. I do love them and the many benefits they offer, especially when playing theatres and using in-ear monitors, as we do. But for pub gigs and the occasional dep you can't beat the simplicity of sticking a combo on a chair, a few pedals on the floor, and hanging a guitar on its stand. It looks way more rock 'n' roll, too.

And on that subject you've doubtless heard me tell about how I acquired a Mark II Boogie in 1980. A good friend was mates with the brilliant guitarist Phil Palmer (he's worked with Knopfler and Clapton among others). Phil had bought three Boogies in the States and was selling one to help fund the others. My mate organised the deal and that amp became my only tone source until I got my Matchless DC30 in 1994.

"The Mark I Reissue Boogie with an EV-loaded Mesa 'Thiele' ported cab is a great combination, but it's a bit weighty for this old back"

Even among guitarists, the Boogie name wasn't widely known at the time, so the commonest question I got asked of my mahogany and wicker combo was, "Did you build it yourself?" Followed by, "You're not using a distortion pedal. How do you get all that sustain and overdrive?" It's true, the only pedals I owned were a Boss chorus and analogue delay, and with my Telecaster this simple setup made a glorious noise.

I used delay because my Boogie didn't have reverb, and there weren't really any pedals of the type around back then. So I wrote to Mesa in Petaluma, California, asking if a reverb tank and circuit could be retrofitted. My handwriting is notoriously bad, and when I received a reply some weeks later, telling me it was not possible, the envelope was addressed to 'Rezille Mooten', a name I'm still addressed as by certain ex-*Guitarist* luminaries.

Anyway, recently I traded a guitar for some money and a Mark I Reissue Boogie head from about 1990, with an Electro-Voice-loaded Mesa 'Thiele' ported cabinet. Although a great combination it's a bit weighty for this old back, so a plan was hatched.

## Combo Conversion

I spoke to Paul Gough at Zilla Cabs down in Tintagel and between us we came up with a solution. Paul would build my Mark I head into a Boogie sized 1x12 pine combo cabinet. Recalling my old combo, also fitted with a 12-inch EV speaker, that thing weighed a ton for its size. So we're going for a neodymium Celestion Creamback, which sounds as close to the original as possible but is featherweight by comparison. And while the amp portion of the assembly is still a hefty lump, I'm hoping the combo won't be too hard to lug around.

Now, as you know if you've seen Zilla's website, the choice of coverings and grille cloths is unreal. Every colour under the sun, and virtually any material type and combination thereof, means it's tempting to go bonkers. Purple suede with a gold glitter front anyone? However, I said to Paul that I wanted to stay classic, so chose the original blonde Tolex covering that many early Boogies came attired in. I did mention that the red alligator looked amazing, though, so Paul made one of each, just in case. Although it looked incredible, I managed to hold firm on my decision, and the 'new' amp is currently being serviced prior to final assembly. I await its arrival with much excitement and anticipation.

I'm moving back to my old north Essex stomping ground soon and several mates have expressed an interest in having me join in various projects. So I'm hoping that, with my new simplified pedalboard, which should be ready at about the same time, it will make a great little rig. I can't wait to get rocking again!

PHOTO: WWW.SUPROUSA.COM

## NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

Pedal Platform

**What?** Supro Keeley Custom 12 **Where seen?** www.hotroxuk.com **Price?** £895

Talking about an amp that's ideal with pedals got me to this one. The only combo around that's co-designed by a pedal manufacturer, the legendary Robert Keeley, this pretty little 1x12 fits the bill as well as anything I've seen. If you're looking for features then forget it, as this is deliberately designed and voiced for pedals, so you won't even find reverb onboard. There is, however, an effects send and return so you can put these types of sounds in the loop, while feeding overdrive and distortion into the front. The retro look is mega cool, it's fitted with a Celestion G12M-65 Creamback speaker, and at a grand or under you really can't go wrong.

# Lucky Break

**Alex Bishop** blends old wood with new in an attempt to fix a severely damaged guitar headstock

If guitars could talk, I'm certain the instrument laying across my bench would recount innumerable tales of late night rock 'n' roll excess and half-remembered gigs. One can imagine the countless ballads accompanied in smoke-filled folk clubs, or hear thrashed powerchords on a sweaty open mic night. The corrugated surface of the cedar top was worn away beyond the finish long ago, scarred by the relentless attack of plectrums and fingernails digging into the soft timber. This instrument is an icon and celebration of the power and energy of live music.

Unfortunately, though, it has strummed its swan song. A long split along the treble side of the soundboard creaks open as the strings are detuned. A gnarled nut falls off the guitar in a couple of pieces, and the splintered headstock yawns open like the jaws of some dying animal.

Broken headstocks are one of the most common repairs that pass through my workshop, and indeed to most guitarists it can appear fatal. However, there are just about as many ways to fix one as there are ways of breaking them. The instrument in question had had a chequered history – signs of multiple previous botched headstock repairs were obvious, and this proved to be an obstacle in what I hoped would be a straightforward job.

## Action Plan

Once I had removed the machineheads, I wanted to simply close the crack with a pair of heavy duty F-clamps and clamping blocks either side of the headstock. However, the build up of old epoxy glue and swelled wood meant nothing was going to close it, so there was only one thing for it – put the headstock out of its misery and fully break it off myself.

With the headstock removed, I could properly inspect the damage. There was no way I was going to be able to graft the old headstock back on without drastically shortening it, and in any case the shattered 0.6mm thin veneer on the front was totally compromised and would offer no structural assistance in preventing such damage from happening again, especially once the full force of six steel strings was pulling on it. So I opted to remake the headstock from scratch and splice it onto the spear-like remains of the guitar neck.

Picking an appropriate piece of wood was going to be the next step. Luckily, the timber flotsam strewn throughout my guitar-making workshop yielded a piece of mahogany that would match the rest of the neck perfectly. After a few swift cuts on the bandsaw, it was whittled down slightly oversize, to be then glued on as a 'scarf' join. This is the most common way of putting together any guitar neck: by taking a slice from a plank at an angle, the offcut is simply flipped over and glued to the underside, creating that familiar angle for the strings to pass over at the nut before entering the tuners on the other side.

A satisfying before-and-after example of a bad headstock break made good by expert hands

## Hold Strong

The decorative black veneer on the face of most guitar headstocks does more than serve as a backdrop for a fancy logo or inlay design. It provides important structural rigidity that not only stiffens the headstock to support the scarf join but also helps with tuning stability. Keen to ensure my hard work would not later come undone, I decided to plane down a piece of Crelicam ebony to span the headstock. The jet black heartwood of *Diospyros crassiflora* not only looked beautiful but was remarkably hard: the perfect cap for my headstock repair.

> "Headstock breaks can appear fatal. However, there are just about as many ways to fix one as there are ways of breaking them"

All that remained was to carve the transition from the new headstock and blend it seamlessly with the old neck. This was mostly accomplished with chisels and knives for maximum control; it was imperative that I avoided reworking any areas of the neck that didn't need retouching in order to maintain the original finish and retain the original feel of the neck. Finally, any fresh wood was stained and oiled, and the guitar was restrung with a fresh set of strings. The first chords reverberated, phoenix-like, around the workshop, ready to rock for another few decades – at least.

**Head to Alex's Instagram post at https://bit.ly/git512alex to watch a video of some of the repair in action**

PHOTOS BY ALEX BISHOP

# Staple Diet

Want P-90 tone but with a bit more clarity? Try a staple pickup, writes **Jamie Dickson**, as he readies his modded Tele for a new addition

Many years ago, in one of the first issues of *Guitarist* magazine I ever read, there was a report from a vintage guitar show. Among the pics of Paisley Telecasters and 'Bursts was a shot of a black Les Paul Custom fitted with what, to my inexperienced eyes, appeared to be an unusual neck pickup. It had chunky rectangular polepieces and looked like a relic from an earlier era. This, I later discovered, was Gibson's Alnico V pickup, also known as the 'Staple' pickup because of those evenly spaced rectangular polepieces.

It was not all that surprising that I didn't know what it was, however, because it had a short life in Gibson's guitars. Introduced in 1954, it was designed to take the warm tone of the P-90 pickups fitted to most Gibson electrics at that point and add a little more clarity to the equation. Stuart Robson of Sunbear Pickups believes it was created to placate that eternal tinkerer Les Paul, who often fitted heavily modified pickups of his own devising to his Les Pauls, sometimes home-wound on DeArmond pickup internals. This would hardly have reflected well on Gibson's then-standard P-90, the stock pickup of nearly all Les Pauls from 1952 to 1957, so Stuart believes they devised the Alnico V pickup to get closer to the style of neck pickup Les really wanted.

"Like so many things with the early Gibson stories, you never quite know what's absolutely the truth or what's what people have surmised over the years," Stuart says with a chuckle. "But my personal take on this is that there are pictures of Les Paul in the early 50s playing what were probably the very first Les Paul Customs. And you can see that in the neck of those guitars, he had pulled out what was presumably a stock P-90 and put in [what looks like] a Dynasonic [also known as DeArmond Model 2000] pickup.

"So, while I've never heard this directly from anyone at Gibson, my presumption has always been that Gibson probably turned around to Les and said, 'Well, we really would rather not have a Gretsch pickup in the guitar that you're playing on stage every night. Why don't we make something which is basically the same thing?' Because the truth is that the original Gibson Alnico V staple pickup – with the exception of the wire and the shape of the magnet – is, in terms of construction, almost a direct replication of the Dynasonic.

"Nearly everything about it is the same, right down to the way that the magnets are raised and lowered," Stuart continues. "So I think I think probably what Gibson were doing was trying to give Les a neck pickup with the Gibson name on it that would do the job that he was swapping in the [modified] Dynasonics to do – which, in all likelihood, given his playing style, was to make the neck pickup clear."

The original Alnico V neck pickup, as used by Gibson on some of its earlier Les Paul Customs, was complicated to make and did not last long in mainstream production

PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON

## Take Five

Whatever the truth of this might have been, the arrival of the PAF humbucker in 1957 saw the Alnico V pickup consigned to the graveyard of history. When we asked Gibson's now vice president of product, Mat Koehler, about the reason for the complete phasing out of the Alnico V a couple of years back, he gave this answer:

"I now understand that they're very difficult to build. It's part of the reason why we're redeveloping the staple pickup as we speak, to be more factory-friendly. The design itself was a little crude – we have Seth Lover's original drawings and you can tell that this wasn't his instinctual way to create a pickup. This was Les Paul in his ear saying, 'This is what you should do.' I think that had a lot to do with it. But it does serve a purpose and it has a fantastic jazz tone, which is why you see it on archtop models, too. I think, really, the reason that it wasn't more prevalent is just because of the difficulty to construct it."

Gibson isn't the only one to be taking a second look at the Alnico V pickup, however. A number of independent pickup makers have revived the design, in simplified form, because people are belatedly realising that the pickup's clarity is its secret weapon, making it sound more like an immense Strat neck pickup than a vintage P-90. The effect is quite addictive, as I discovered when I tried

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNBEAR PICKUPS

These humbucker-sized SB-Staple V pickups with a torty cover are the variant Jamie chose for his Tele's new neck pickup

a Patrick James Eggle Macon Special fitted with Mojo Pickups' take on the Alnico V – the P90 Soapbar Staple. Paired with a Filter'Tron-style bridge humbucker it offered bounce and bloom that contrasted beautifully with the bridge pickup's crisp grind.

The experience stuck in my mind, so when the aforementioned Stuart Robson of Sunbear Pickups mentioned he was developing his own take on the Alnico V pickup, I pricked up my ears. I was looking for a way to customise my already-modded AVRI '52 Telecaster and I suddenly thought what a nice addition a staple pickup at the neck might be. I'm not one of the traditional Tele neck pickup's detractors; some players don't rate them at all, but I've always liked the little silver tube that the Tele has sported at the neck since its inception. However, while not in the least unhappy with my Tele's excellent set of Lollar Special T pickups, I think I must be a frustrated jazz player as I'm on the neck pickup more than anything else – and, as such, I wouldn't mind if it had some serious fatness and clout beyond the design limitations of traditional Tele pickups.

The Alnico V staple has always intrigued me. I've always thought it looked cool, too. In the neck position of a Tele, it could look both vintage and a bit different, I reflected. So I took the plunge and called Stuart at Sunbear and ordered a single, humbucker-sized SB-Staple V pickup with a plan to put it in the neck position of my Tele. Stuart offers some great styling options on his pickups, which I made full use of, opting for his 'aged' finish and a tortoiseshell cover on top of the pickup where the 'staples' protrude. The pickup is wound to 7k DC resistance, so it shouldn't be a mismatch with the Lollar Special T bridge pickup that will remain in place, which is wound to 8k DC resistance. In fact, they should match up perfectly, with the neck tending to sound a bit louder anyway.

"A number of independent pickup makers have revived the design... people are realising that the pickup's clarity is its secret weapon"

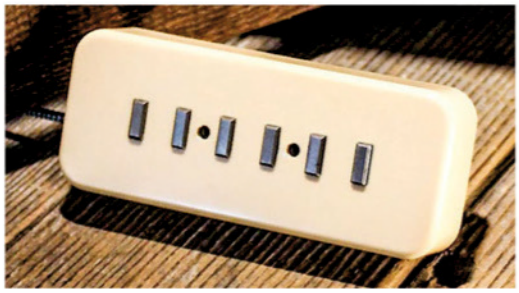
As Stuart winds such pickups to order, I knew there'd be a little wait while he worked his magic. That gave me a bit of time to put out a request for help with routing the body and scratchplate to accept the Staple V, a call that was answered by the estimable Pete Lewis at Lewis Guitar Works. Pete makes impeccably turned-out electrics that have the DNA of classic designs, while adding unique and very cool twists of his own. On this occasion, he kindly said he was happy to make the required customisations to my much-modded reissue Tele once the pickup arrived. For now, I'll just watch and wait for the postman to come, box in hand, up the drive. Stay tuned to hear how the project turns out... G

## THREE TO GET READY

Latter-day Alnico V pickups to try

### Sunbear SB-Staple V From £165

Hand-built, Sunbear's SB-Staple V for the neck position features custom-spec, bevelled Alnico V magnets, plain enamel 50s-spec wire and is wound to 7.3k DC resistance. Sunbear also offers a bridge version with a taller coil that grants an output hike to 10k and changes the pickup's resonant peak characteristics to suit edgy twang. The SB-Staple V is available in soapbar, dog-ear, humbucker and mini-humbucker sized variants.



### Lollar P-90 Staple $155

Jason Lollar is one of the finest pickup winders on the planet, so his updated take on the venerable Alnico V Staple deserves your attention. This one is made to fit directly into guitars routed for P-90s. Lollar says: "Our updated version is more articulate than our standard P-90 and produces higher output while maintaining a clear top-end."

### Mojo Pickups P90 Soapbar Staple £90 to £200

Mojo says of its Alnico V that it is "brighter than a standard P-90 but retains P-90 character. The nickel covers [where used] are nickel-plated nickel silver metal, not plastic...", adding that the pickup is hand-wound with 42 AWG wire to yield a 7k neck output and 8.8k for the bridge. These are also available in humbucker size and other configurations.

# Tritone Substitution

This month **Richard Barrett** changes a chord within a progression to showcase some interesting melodic ideas

The term tritone refers to an interval that spans three whole tones. For example, this could be: C to D, D to E then E to F#. However, another way of looking at it could be as an augmented 4th (C to F#) or a diminished 5th (C to G♭). As you can see, these are all different names for one specific sound. Once we get into chord progressions and 'diatonic speak' such as II-V-I, you may well come across the term 'tritone substitution'. All this actually means is that a chord within a progression (usually the V) has been exchanged for another with the root a tritone away.

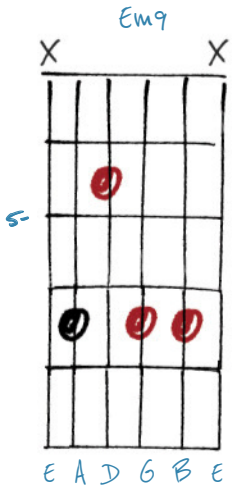
Let's explore this with a couple of examples. First, a jazzy II-V-I in C major would be Dm7-G7-Cmaj7. Then, if we move the G7 up a tritone/aug 4th/dim 5th, we will get a D♭7. Now, the progression would be Dm7-D♭7-Cmaj7, which can support many of the same melodic ideas but positions them in a different light. Why not get experimental and have a go at a Dm7-D♭maj7-Cmaj7 progession? G

PHOTO BY STEVE THORNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

The late guitarist, composer and certainly no stranger to the tritone, Pat Martino, pictured here at the Cheltenham Jazz Festival in 2009

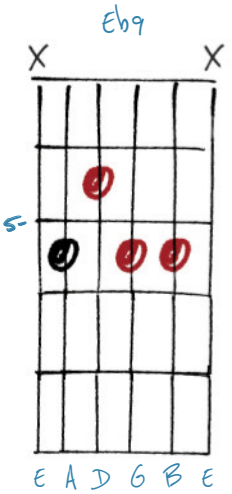
## Example 1

If we took an Em-A7-D (II-V-I) progression and decided to jazz it up with 7ths and extensions, we might well start with this Em9 chord. The F# (9th) is our highest note. I mention this because the F# will be the highest note of one of our other examples, too.



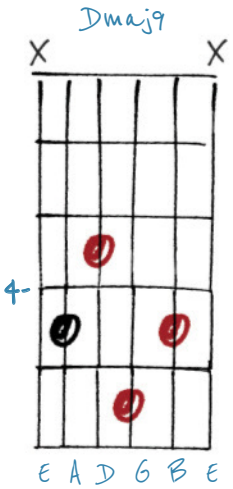

## Example 2

As the V chord, the A is the most likely candidate in our sights for substitution. Let's make it a dominant 7th, then shift it up a tritone (#4/♭5) to give us E♭7. Then let's go even further and make it a E♭9. Now we're ready for the I chord.



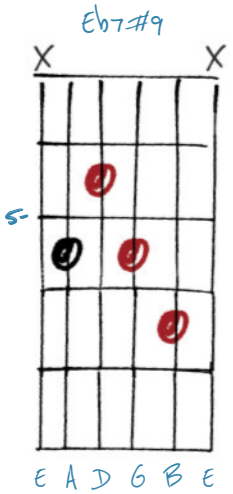

## Example 3

The I of our II-V-I (D) sounds a bit plain after all that, so I'm opting to make it a Dmaj9. This voicing with the E (9th) on top gives a chromatic run down in parallel with the bass, which sounds harmonically linear and pleasing – though, as always, it's a personal choice.



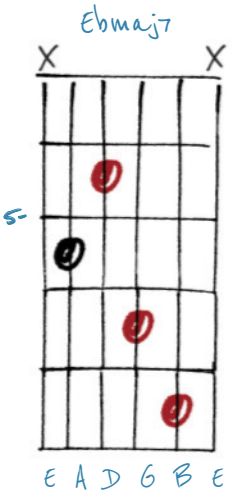

## Example 4

Now we've heard the 'deluxe' version of the II-V-I, let's have a play with some alterations. How about this E♭7#9 in place of the E♭9? It keeps the F# from our Em9 as the highest note, which gives a nice continuity as the other voices shift. Follow with a Dmaj7 with the F# on top and you have a matching set!




## Example 5

This final example goes slightly outside the theoretical definition of a tritone substitute by being a major 7th rather than dominant 7th, but I don't think we should let that bother us as it sounds great! This E♭maj7 fits beautifully if you finish by playing the same chord down one semitone/fret to finish on Dmaj7.



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# Feedback

**Your letters** to the *Guitarist* editor.
Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

## STAR LETTER

### STRAT'S THE WAY

After 20-odd years of playing guitar, this year has provided the biggest surprise in that I have finally found a Strat I get on with. I was a late starter at 45 and, as a humbucker fan, my little collection is almost all humbucker-equipped, although there is a P-90 in one of Chris George's beautiful creations. At various times through the last 22 years I have thought, 'I need a Strat,' but all attempts – Fender, Suhr, Music Man, even a custom build – have resulted in me moving them on as I simply could not get on with them. I never got on with the extra tension of the longer scale and had also decided that I didn't like maple 'boards, the big Fender headstock, vintage-radius 'boards, or a single-coil bridge pickup.

Anyhow, I recently decided to trade my lovely old Eggle Vienna because, at 10lbs-plus, I was just never picking it up. So it was time for another Strat experiment. A guy offered me a deal involving a Japanese FSR Strat, 7.25-inch radius maple 'board, big headstock... But what the heck, I did the trade. As soon as I plugged it in at home I was shocked to be completely hooked into it. It just felt right and the neck pickup tone was beautiful. It's probably the least expensive Strat I have had, but somehow it just works for me despite it having so many features I didn't like.

So I've put a JB Jr pickup in the bridge and locking Sperzels from the spares tin, a BladeRunner trem and it is everything I wanted a Strat to be – but never found before. What I find more bizarre is the way it has changed and broadened my playing. Maybe it's the maple 'board, or maybe it's the vintage radius, but I'm now doing less legato and more digging in with the pick, and I've carried that over to my regular humbucker guitars. There might be a lesson to learn here, but, for me, I'm just loving this FSR and am finally Stratified.

**Peter Collister**

**That's a really nice story, Peter, and we're glad that you finally succumbed to the charm of Leo's wonderful invention. It's often the case that you need to park your preferences when you go looking for a bit of guitar-shaped companionship these days as sometimes you can find a make or model that you bond with instantly but have previously disregarded. To paraphrase the late, great Frank Zappa, "If a guitar leaps into your arms and shouts, 'Take me, I'm yours,' then that's the one!"**

VOX AMPLIFICATION LTD.

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a pair of Vox VGH AC30 guitar amplifier headphones!
**www.voxamps.com**

### RAINSONG ACOUSTICS

In all the years I have been reading your excellent magazine, Rainsong, the American all-graphite electro-acoustic guitar manufacturer has never been mentioned. Nine years ago at the Christmas of a big birthday year I visited our local guitar shop to invest in a well-researched 12-string, having always loved the jangle. My wife does not share my love of guitar, but has a clinical eye for quality and persuaded me to try a Rainsong JM3000. I had a biblical experience, but one look at the price tag brought me back to earth until my wife whispered those words I guess some of you have heard before: 'I'll buy it for you.'

I can understand how these guitars may be considered boring as there's no truss rod to adjust and no tonewoods or CITES controversies to debate. But with shark inlays and awesome playability straight out of the box and case every time, they're a dream to own and play. And they're light, too.

Being all-graphite, has this manufacturer literally slipped below your radar?

**Mac McGregor**

**We've been aware of Rainsong for a while – in fact, our deputy editor even recommended one to a busker friend as they surely have to be the perfect instruments to deal with the British climate. Sadly, it seems that the Seattle-based company closed its doors at the end of last year due, we're told, to the owner of the company retiring.**

### FAME AT LAST?

I was wondering if your good selves, or possibly some of your readers, could shed some light on my favourite guitar? It's a 1991 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Gold Top Hall Of Fame (HOF) edition. There seems to be precious little information out there about exactly what the HOF run of guitars was all about. When I bought it I was told that the HOF was a limited run of 200 or so each of the Deluxe, Junior and Flying V models. What sets this apart from a normal Deluxe is the all-over gold finish and the HOF logo on the back of the headstock.

I contacted Gibson, who told me this: "Gibson Custom Shop made, only in 1991, Nashville, Tennessee. Around 200 to 250 produced. Hall Of Fame special edition: all gold finish, a complete coat of gold finish on the neck and back. It has the annotation on the back of the head 'Hall of Fame Edition' in a gold decal, under the clear coat. Bullion gold, chrome hardware."

Pretty much what I already knew (but nice to know it's a Custom Shop model!). Any help gratefully received. Or maybe I should just contact Mr Bonamassa...

**Rob Tidd**

Rob Tidd is appealing for more information on his 1991 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Gold Top Hall Of Fame model (right), from the mystery of its overall concept to uncovering any official documentation, should it exist. Can you help?

**Alas, our research into Gibson's Hall Of Fame guitars didn't reveal any more information than you already have at hand, Rob. We can't determine if the guitars came with any certification, for instance. So let's throw the question open to our readership: does anyone know anything more about the HOF range? Let us know and we'll pass the information on.**

## COUNTRY LIFE

In last month's edition of *Guitarist* (issue 511), Leighton Bruce was asking about Country guitars. I believe they were manufactured at the Matsumoku factory in Japan, which operated from the late 1960s until its closure in 1987. At the time Matsumoku were one of the finest guitar manufacturers in Japan and one of the first companies to install CNC machines in order to increase their output. They produced a large number of guitars for companies like Aria, Epiphone and Univox.

When Gibson moved the production of their Epiphone guitars to Japan in the early 1970s they engaged Aria as the contractor who in turn used Matsumoku for production. This included archtop guitars like the Casino model, so they were more than capable of producing Leighton's 335-style guitar.

**Phil Handley**

**We've had a number of letters answering Leighton's plea for information about this instrument and take pleasure in passing on the information you've managed to research. Thanks to everyone who contacted us!**

## PICKUP PRAISE

There are, as you have mentioned, many excellent UK-based pickup manufacturers and it's great when you promote them. Can I put in a shout out for two small companies that are making fantastic products for guitarists, makers and modders? I just received a Lightning [Stop] Bar, bought as a result of Dave Burrluck's review a few issue ago [in The Mod Squad, issue 506]. It is a thing of beauty, it's simple and it just works. What could be better?

Likewise, the replacement bridges made by Wudtone. I've got one fitted in a '57 reissue Strat and it's made a great guitar excellent, improving the tone, the sustain and the tuning stability. Thanks guys!

**Kenn Palmer**

**Thanks for your comments, Kenn. Smaller companies are often eclipsed by the larger, more established brands, and it's always great to hear when something that has been produced on a smaller scale proves to be the perfect product for improving playability and performance.**

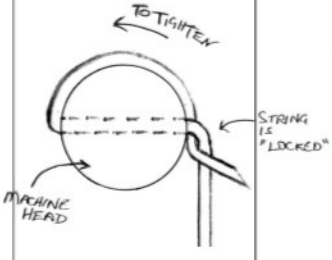
## LOCKED ON

I was reading the article by Huw Price [Nitty Gritty, issue 510] regarding machineheads, and specifically the paragraph entitled 'Attachment Issues'. I remember that in a *Guitarist* issue published many years ago, you showed a way of locking the strings without the need to wrap the string numerous times around the machinehead. I have attached a diagram showing this method, which I have used since then and never had any tuning issues. The string passes through the hole in the post and is wrapped in the opposite direction and tucked under the string. When tightened, the string is effectively locked. As a refinement, I cut the unused part of the string and bend it in half so that the sharp end is alongside the post and pointing away from the tuning button (and my fingers!).

It's quick, simple and there's no need to use a string winder. It can be a little more fiddly if you have Fender-type machineheads as you have to use the slot in the top, but this method can still be used.

**Paul Chumley**

**Restringing a guitar is always a chore and strings have an uncanny knack of unwinding themselves if you don't keep a watchful eye on them, and so we're sure this method will come in handy for many readers experiencing issues.**




Paul Chumley's nifty little diagram describes the tried-and-tested method of locking your strings without much wrapping around the machinehead, a trick he discovered in these very pages and continues to use today

As a longtime reader of the mag and custodian of a seriously impressive guitar room of instruments and amps, Rodney Lim – we salute you!

Anthony brought the baritone format within his reach by modding a budget to model to his personal specification

## PICTURE PERFECT

I have been an avid reader of your magazine for close to 40 years now. You were my best buddy when I was serving in the military and have continued to be my entire working life. I have fond memories of flipping through your pages when Joe Satriani still had luscious hair and Zakk Wylde was still a clean-shaven poster boy. Most of all, you never fail to induce severe GAS in me! Over these years, I have accumulated quite a substantial guitar collection as well as stacks of past issues and CDs, which I treasure dearly.

I must give a standing ovation to the photography team for the outstanding job. I have never seen better photos in any other guitar magazines. Keep up the fabulous job! Thanks again, buddy!

**Rodney Lim, Singapore**

**Your comments flatter us, Rodney, and it's lovely to hear that you've been a reader for nearly as long as the magazine has been on the shelves – and to see your enviable collection (above). We take great pride in the photography in the magazine and will pass on your comments to our snappers!**

## THE LOWDOWN

For some time I have been interested in baritone guitars, but after seeing the prices, I realised I could not afford one. One day I came across one in my budget so I bought it, but I was a bit disappointed with the quality, so I added better-quality tuning pegs, and the pickguard was one-ply so I bought a sheet of three-ply pickguard material and made my own. I also changed the bridge pickup for a Belcat one, fitted Schaller strap buttons and D'Addario XL 13/62 strings – all that for £200. The problem now is arthritis in my hands, neck and shoulders, and so playing time is limited to about 10 to 15 minutes before I need a rest, but that's life as you get older.

**Anthony Lloyd**

**We're glad that your quest for a baritone proved fruitful and that a little bit of judicious modding brought the guitar more into focus as a favourite instrument. It sounds like you bagged a bargain, too. We hope that your health issues don't prevent you from spending many happy hours exploring its depths.**

## FULL NELSON

Thanks for the Bill Nelson article in the June issue. The range of instruments is extraordinary, exotic, futuristic-looking and chimes with Bill's retro space-age interest. I'm pleased that the Gibson ES-345 holds such a prized place in it all. I saw Be-Bop Deluxe in Sheffield City Hall on the Modern Music tour, and Bill was pouring out reams of fluid improvisation from it to teenyboppers with Bebop scarves. I also caught him again post-Be-Bop, in Retford Porterhouse on the *Quit Dreaming* tour. He was on his own, using an EBow on a Yamaha SG, competing with the downstairs disco thuds. I wonder whether he still has that guitar?

**Chris JP Smith**

**Glad you enjoyed the interview, Chris. Bill is definitely a national treasure as far as guitarists are concerned and his praises are often left unsung. We're happy to have had a hand in redressing that issue in the magazine.**

**Send Your letters** to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

# WIN!
# A Gordon Smith GS1 Heritage!

**Here's your chance to win a 50th anniversary guitar from the esteemed UK maker**

If you want the definition of 'workhorse', this Gordon Smith GS-1 is it and has been for just about all of the brand's 50-year story. The unshowy, simplistic, all-mahogany build of the original double-cutaway design fuelled many a punk and classic rock band back in the day. It's just as valid now.

This Heritage version retails at £1,299 (including a hard case) and uses the thicker 44mm depth body for an extra bit of clout, while the craft of the contemporary company is up there with the best. Powered by a new-generation GS covered humbucker, with coil-split, it might just be the perfect rhythm machine: "1, 2, 3, 4 – see you at the other end!"

All you have to do to be in with a chance of winning this guitar is head to the link below and follow the online instructions. Good luck!

**Who were the company's co-founders?**

A) *Gordon Smith and John Whitham*
B) *Gordon Whitham and John Smith*
C) *John Smith and John Gordon*

## CLOSING DATE 18 JULY 2024

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**Terms and conditions:** By taking part you agree to be bound by these terms and the competition rules at https://www.futureplc.com/competition-rules/. The opening date for entries is 00:00 (UK Time) on 18 May 2024 and will close at 23:59 (UK Time) on 18 July 2024. The competition is free to enter and entries must be submitted via http://bit.ly/git512gordonsmith. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Entries are limited to one per individual. Open to all UK residents aged 18 and over, except employees of Future Publishing Limited ("Future"), Auden Musical Instrument Co., Ltd ("Sponsor") and any party involved in the competition. There will be one winner entitled to the featured item provided by the Sponsor and selected at random. The winner will be randomly drawn from all valid entries received and shall be notified by Future by email or telephone within 14 days of the closing date. Upon notification the winners will be required to supply details of a UK delivery address. If a winner has not responded after two weeks of being notified that they are a winner, an alternative winner will be drawn. The prize is non-transferable and non-refundable. There is no cash alternative.

# NICK GUPPY

*December 1958 to April 2024*

## It is with great sadness that we report the passing of our highly valued amplifier guru, who died suddenly in April

**Words** Dave Burrluck

Nick contributed his detailed, authoritative amp reviews in almost every issue of *Guitarist* for well over two decades. He came onto our radar after writing a letter to then *Guitarist* editor, Neville Marten, wondering if we needed someone to write about amplifiers. He included a review he'd written and, hugely impressed, Neville commissioned him on the spot.

Born in December 1958, Nick caught the rock 'n' roll bug early on, and although he attended Cheltenham Grammar School (like a certain Rolling Stone), his long-time friend Cos remembers him as "a bit of a rebel". Neville remembers him as a "monster" guitar player, too, and he served time with many local bands, not least The Detonators during the 80s, toting his self-built guitar based on a Gibson SG. "Nick actually wanted to be a session player," but, remembers Cos, "punk rock ruined that – his words."

*"Nick's knowledgeable depth, thoroughness and fairness in his reviews earned him a distinguished position as a true authority"* STEVE MUELLER, MESA/BOOGIE & GIBSON

He's remembered by all who knew him as a humble, modest man, but "give him a guitar or anything to do with amps... that's all he talked about", Cos tells us, a recurring theme among the tributes we've received.

"Nick was a gentle, softly spoken man – but when he had a guitar or a pen in his hand, it was a different story," says Blackstar's director of marketing, Joel Richardson. "He wrote with guru-like knowledge and an understanding of the guitar player's needs. As a new company 17 years ago, we knew that, to succeed, our products needed to impress Nick Guppy. This is a value we uphold to this very day. We wear the Gold and Choice awards given by Nick with pride as we know he didn't give them freely. It will take some time to come to terms with the fact we won't be able to tell Nick about our latest products and wait eagerly for his opinion to be printed in *Guitarist* magazine. From all at Blackstar: thank you, Nick. You have helped us more than you could ever know."

"Nick was a revered and respected voice within the world's guitar playing community," says Steve Mueller (Product Development, Mesa/Boogie & Gibson Amplifiers). "His knowledgeable depth, thoroughness and fairness in his reviews earned him a distinguished position as a true authority. He will live on through this massive body of work. It will underscore his legacy as one of the most authoritative and prolific reviewers the world has ever known."

From an editor's perspective, Nick was the perfect contributor, not only for *Guitarist* but also *Total Guitar*. Nothing was too much trouble. His copy was always early, always accurate. Above all, reading his words, you'd be thinking, 'I *need* one of those!' We can only guess how many hundreds or thousands of amps he helped to sell.

And while Nick came from the old-school all-valve world, he embraced modern digital technologies and is one of few who have written comprehensively about the demise of the valve and its implications for the musician. He traced the evolution of non-valve designs over the past decades and was never short of advice as to how some of those early designs could be improved.

"Nick was a notable advocate of Boss Katana amplifiers and wrote about them in penetrating detail," comments Rod Brakes on behalf of Boss. "A renowned authority on the subject of amps, he enlightened fellow guitarists by imparting rare knowledge and wisdom gleaned from his lifelong passion."

Matthew Smith from Bad Cat says: "The guitar playing community worldwide will mourn the loss of a person the likes of whom we are unlikely to see again; we are all the poorer for it. Nick, thank you so much for the years of consistently outstanding writing you gave us, and sharing your love for all things guitar. You're a class act."

"Nick's contribution to the world of the electric guitar was outstanding, his knowledge and experience second to none, and his passing leaves a big hole to fill," says Cliff Brown at 633 Engineering. "His passion for great engineering and great tone was inspiring, and on a personal level he was very encouraging to me. When designing a new amp, part of the process would always be, 'What will Nick think?' He was a true gentleman and will be missed."

We'll leave the last words to Neville Marten, who gave Nick the opportunity to share his passion all those years ago: "Not only will he be missed by family and friends, but also by everyone at the magazine and I'm sure his thousands of loyal readers. Many thanks, Nick. Safe travels."

# DICKEY BETTS

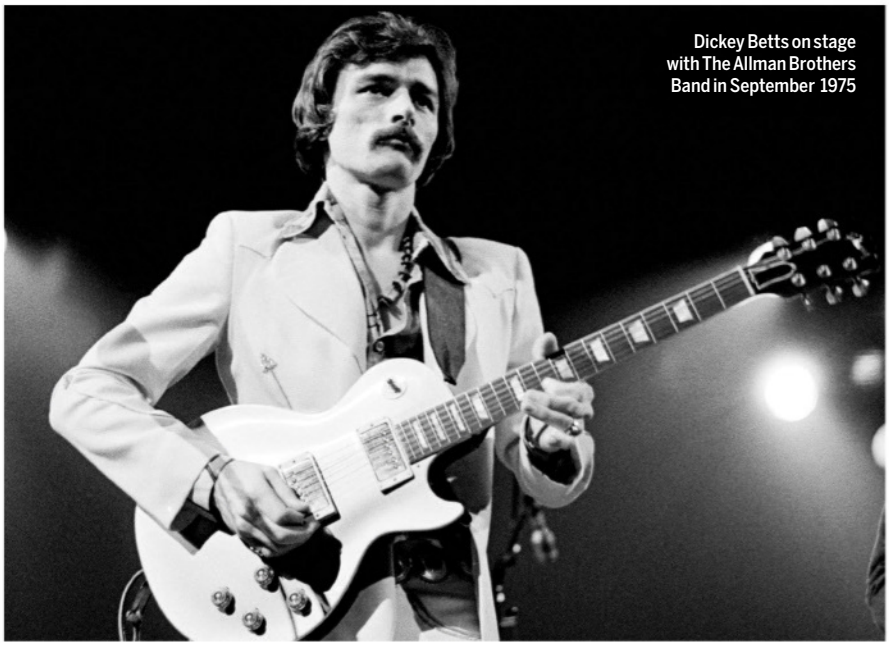
*December 1943 to April 2024*

## Emerging from the shadow of Duane to write signature hit *Ramblin' Man*, the Allman Brothers guitarist was a hard-living pioneer of Southern rock

**Words** Henry Yates

"I've definitely lived a dangerous life," Dickey Betts once admitted, and you only had to see him to know it. A stern gunslinger with a cowboy hat, handlebar moustache and '57 Goldtop, Betts' outlaw stage presence in The Allman Brothers Band often bled into his hairy personal life. Despite that, his passing on 18 April aged 80 meant he outlived all but one of his co-founders in a group synonymous with early death.

Born Forrest Richard Betts in 1943, his Florida family's bluegrass background meant the young Southerner took up first the ukulele, then banjo and mandolin, before the epiphany of Chuck Berry's *Maybellene* – and perhaps the realisation that "girls like guitars" – showed him the path. An early band, Second Coming, featured Berry Oakley on bass, and after the pair jammed with session ace Duane Allman in 1969 – convincing him to bury the hatchet and bring in kid brother Gregg on vocals – the great pioneers of Southern Rock had their nucleus.



Dickey Betts on stage with The Allman Brothers Band in September 1975

PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

*In the end – and unlike so many of his bandmates – Dickey Betts managed to achieve both sides of the rock 'n' roll equation, by living fast but dying old*

Flying in the face of two-guitar wisdom, whereby most 60s bands assigned chords to one player and solos to the other, both Duane and Betts played lead, their intricate dovetailed harmonies spellbinding to hear. While the former was a slide specialist, the latter quickly announced his sweet-but-fiery touch and writing skills. Early compositions like *Revival* became fan favourites, while the 12-minute version of *In Memory Of Elizabeth Reed*, from the Allmans' million-selling 1971 live album *At Fillmore East*, was a fiery groove in thrall to Miles Davis.

Duane was better known, thanks to his cameo on Clapton's *Layla* ("I'm the famous guitar player," he insisted, "but Dickey is the good one"). But after the slide man perished on the road in October 1971 – followed a year later by Oakley – the survivors turned to Betts. Practising hard to cover his late wingman's slide parts ("Songs like *Statesboro Blues* would have sounded silly without it"), he also stepped up as a writer, penning the group's signature song *Ramblin' Man* in five minutes, and almost offering it to Johnny Cash when the band deemed it too countrified.

Meanwhile, on the same album, 1973's chart-topping *Brothers And Sisters*, Betts was also behind the somersaulting instrumental *Jessica*. "My little daughter, Jessica, crawled into the room," he recalled of its optimistic feel, "and I just started playing to her, trying to capture the feeling of her crawling and smiling."

But the on/off Allmans remained chaotic and none more so than Betts, whose "playful recklessness behind the eyes" was cited by director Cameron Crowe as the inspiration for a wayward character from 2000's *Almost Famous*. He had previous for clashing with cops when, in 1996, he narrowly avoided jail time after brandishing a handgun at his wife. A hard drinker, Betts began missing shows and he was out of the Allmans line-up for good by 2000 (whether he walked or was fired is debatable).

Betts threatened retirement but rambled on with his eponymous band, and even brain surgery in 2018 couldn't stop him. In the end – and unlike so many of his bandmates – he managed to achieve both sides of the rock 'n' roll equation, by living fast but dying old. "You have to get in there and fight," he told *Rolling Stone*, "and do the best with your amount of time."

# GEORGE VJESTICA

You may not know him at first glance, but the work of Stoke-on-Trent native George Vjestica has probably impacted some of your favourite albums and movies

**Words** Andrew Daly

George Vjestica is part of Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, having first lent his licks to 2013's *Push The Sky Away* before coming on full-time for *Skeleton Tree* (2016). Considering Cave's restless creative muse and Vjestica's following a player like Mick Harvey, his integration into the Bad Seeds machine is no small feat. But then again, the guitar is as much a part of Vjestica's soul as a tool; just ask him: "It's been a constant in my life since I was nine," he tells *Guitarist*. "Rarely does a day go by when I don't pick up a guitar and have a play around. There's something so magical for me in those six strings."

He adds: "I felt so sad when Jeff Beck died, and I really got stuck into how he played. I've got a little studio, and I sat in there for about a month trying to figure out his tone and how he used the tremolo. I became obsessed with that track *Nadia*; I fucking love playing that song just for myself. I can sit in my little shed for hours just playing. There are so many great guitarists and musicians to be inspired by. I could go on forever!"

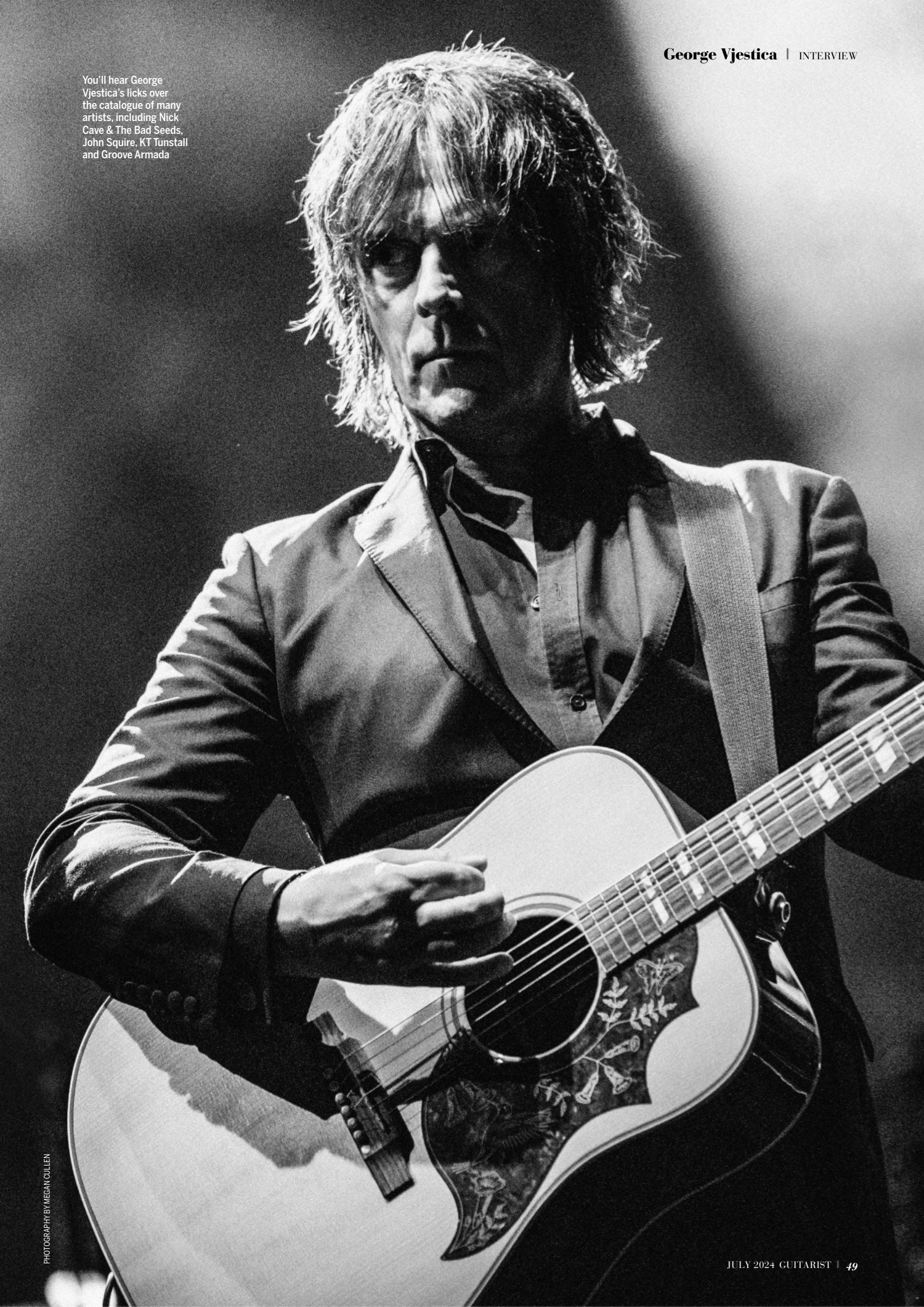
That willingness to shape-shift has served Vjestica well while playing behind Nick Cave, and also John Squire on his *Marshall's House* record from 2004. And it's been an asset while aiding in creating atmospheric scores for films such as *Proposition* (2005) and *Lawless* (2012). Thinking about how his experiences have shaped him over the years, he says: "I'm more geared towards trying to make my own records these days. It's not just about playing the guitar; that is what has changed the most for me. You have to think about how to produce a track or an album and how it's going to sound musically, lyrically and connect emotionally. Self-indulgence is totally fine. I'm all for self-expression."

**What inspired you to pick up the guitar?**
"I saw Jimi Hendrix on the television when I was nine, which lit the fuse. My dad bought me a nylon-stringed guitar for Christmas. That was it – me and the guitar were inseparable."

**What type of music scene did you grow up in?**
"I grew up in Stoke-on-Trent, the same place where Slash spent the first five or so years of his life. It's a working-class town full of industry, so 'rock music', as it used to be known, was a big thing there, but it had a great soul scene and when punk happened that was big. Growing up, live music was everywhere in the 1970s and early 80s."

**Aside from Hendrix, what sorts of guitarists caught your ear?**
"I have two older brothers who always had tapes and borrowed records from their friends, so I listened to a lot of Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Bowie and The Spiders From Mars, and loads of guitar bands. I loved Hendrix, The Who, AC/DC, Thin Lizzy, Be-Bop Deluxe and Yes. Steve Howe was so different from all the other rock guitarists, and on the flip side I loved the Sex Pistols, especially Steve Jones' guitar playing. It was so raw and powerful."

**And how did all that impact you as a player?**
"I went to tons of gigs in my teens. I really found the music that would define me between 12 and 18 years old. I loved The Jam, The Clash, The Pretenders and post-punk stuff like Magazine; John McGeoch and Keith Levene from PiL were major influences. Then



You'll hear George Vjestica's licks over the catalogue of many artists, including Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, John Squire, KT Tunstall and Groove Armada

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEGAN CULLEN

I got into jazz players like Wes Montgomery and Grant Green. Stoke was a great place to see bands – there were loads of venues and Manchester was up the road. It was an amazing time to be young and into music."

**How did you evolve while touring with Groove Armada from 2006?**
"I wouldn't say I evolved as a guitar player with Groove Armada, but playing live and touring with them was a great experience. The shows were mega productions, full on with loads of lasers and big PA systems, and heavy sub-bass everywhere! It was a lot of fun, and I travelled worldwide with them. Playing in Australia, South Africa, Japan and South America was awesome.

"Playing-wise, it was super-tight musically, and with it being dance-oriented music, everything was on click track, so that was a discipline you needed to have. I enjoyed making the *Black Light* and *White Light* albums [2010]; if you listen carefully, you can hear how my James Honeyman-Scott and Bill Nelson influences snuck onto those records!"

**From there, how did you meet John Squire and end up touring with him?**
"Sophie [Upton], his wife, is an old friend. He was looking for a guitar player when he was about to tour his first solo album, *Time Changes Everything*, and she suggested me to John."

**What lessons did you learn from John?**
"He's amazing and somebody I have huge respect for. He gave me a major break and I'll always be grateful to him for that. He's an incredible guitar player, so fluid and lyrical. Guitar-wise, he opened my eyes to different tunings and capo positions. There's something unique about the way he plays the guitar. I worked with him for two years, so I saw up close the way he played. He's like Django Reinhardt, flies all over the fretboard, and he was fucking loud! His phrasing is brilliant."

**What was your touring rig like?**
"I used my Stratocaster, a late '69/'70 sunburst model. I bought it for £400 in 1989, and I used John's old Vox AC15 and had my old AC30 as a backup, a 60s copper top with blue speakers. I got it from Paul Weller's old guitar tech, Dave Liddle. I had a Boss tuner [TU-3], [Dunlop] Cry Baby, an Ibanez Tube Screamer, and a Boss DD-3, a pretty basic setup."

## "Growing up in Stoke-on-Trent, rock music was a big thing, but it had a great soul scene, too, and live music was everywhere"

**What was the experience of working on *Marshall's House* like? How did you and John play off each other?**
"It was great. We'd been playing together for the better part of a year. John had written the songs for *Marshall's House*, so we went to his place, worked them out and rehearsed in the barn there. He was really open, and we kind of did a lot of weaving in and out, guitar-wise. It was instinctive, musically; it was a great band and we all naturally played off each other. It's such a gem that record, so underrated. Both of his solo albums have beautiful songs on them."

**You also played on KT Tunstall's debut EP, *False Alarm*, from 2004. What was the approach like there?**
"KT was going out with John's drummer, Luke Bullen, and she had just got a record deal when I first met her. She was recording her first album, *Eye To The Telescope*, in a tiny place in Bath with Steve Osborne producing. It was a case of going in for the day and playing around with a few songs. The part I played on *False Alarm* was a keeper, and the rest is history. That was a huge album."

**Tell us about putting together the *Lawless* movie soundtrack with Nick Cave.**
"*Lawless* was the second soundtrack I worked on with Nick Cave and Warren Ellis; I played on *The Proposition*, their first soundtrack, back in 2005. It was a mixture of cover songs and a few originals that Nick and Warren had composed. Martyn Casey from the Bad Seeds was playing bass. It was a raw, bastardised version of a bluegrass band! At that time, you had really slick country soundtracks for films, like *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, but this was the total opposite.

"I mainly used a Gibson J-45 on the acoustic songs, and I loved our take on John Lee Hooker's *Burning Hell*; it was completely feral. I used an active guitar that was lying around in the studio, one of those with a battery set up in the back, and as we were recording the track, the guitar was literally dying on me because the battery was fucked. It started to make a really distorted noise. I loved it and Nick loved it. I remember the producer running into the live room saying, 'It sounds like shit!' And we were like, 'Nah, it sounds great!' That stayed on the soundtrack. Full credit to Nick and Warren for sticking to their guns and the support!"

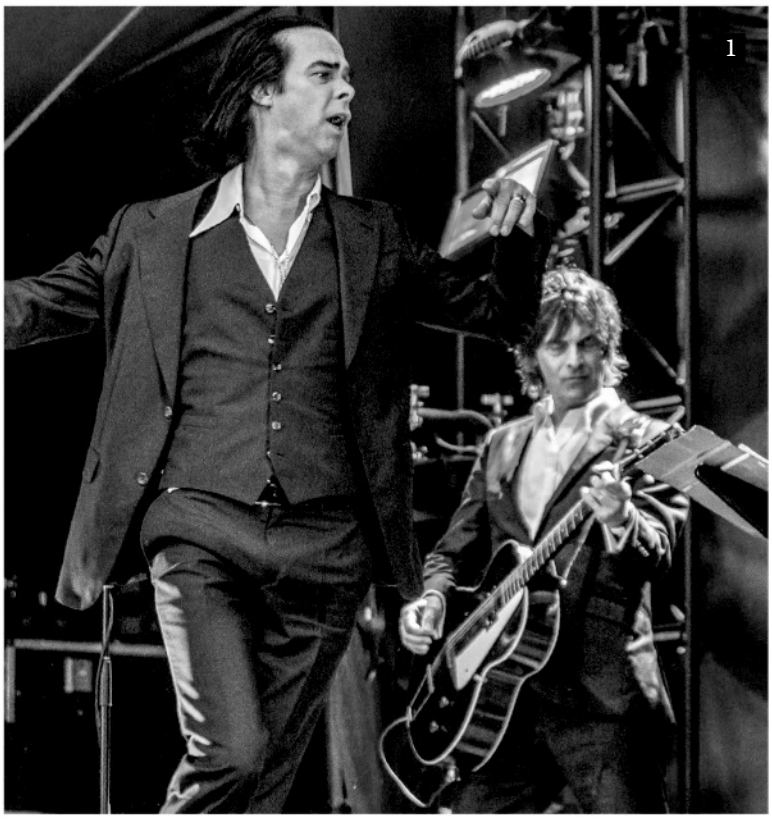
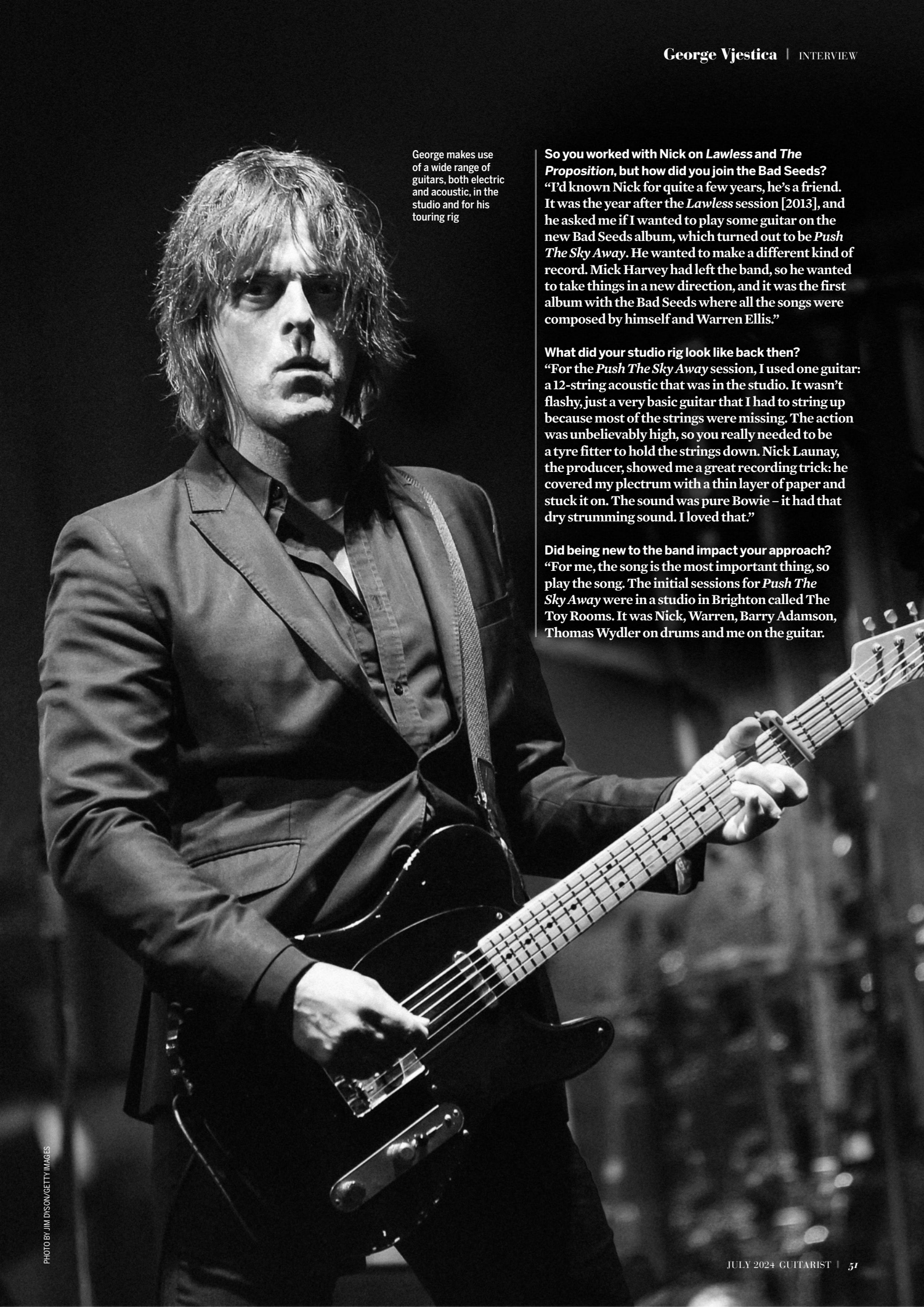



PHOTO BY PER OLE HAGEN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

1. George worked with Nick Cave on the film score for 2005's *The Proposition*, and first contributed to a Bad Seeds album for 2013's *Push The Sky Away*



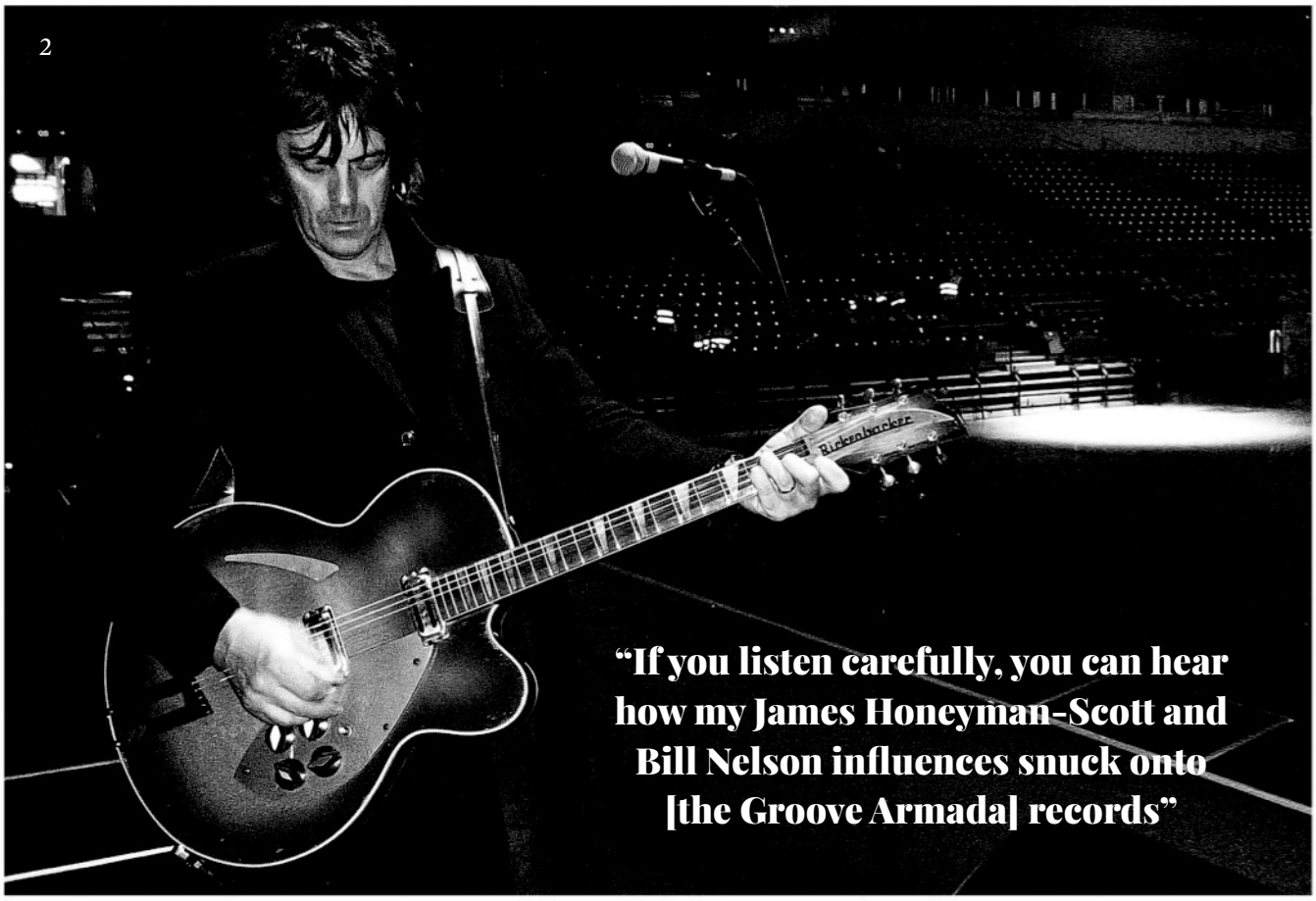
George makes use of a wide range of guitars, both electric and acoustic, in the studio and for his touring rig

**So you worked with Nick on *Lawless* and *The Proposition*, but how did you join the Bad Seeds?**
"I'd known Nick for quite a few years, he's a friend. It was the year after the *Lawless* session [2013], and he asked me if I wanted to play some guitar on the new Bad Seeds album, which turned out to be *Push The Sky Away*. He wanted to make a different kind of record. Mick Harvey had left the band, so he wanted to take things in a new direction, and it was the first album with the Bad Seeds where all the songs were composed by himself and Warren Ellis."

**What did your studio rig look like back then?**
"For the *Push The Sky Away* session, I used one guitar: a 12-string acoustic that was in the studio. It wasn't flashy, just a very basic guitar that I had to string up because most of the strings were missing. The action was unbelievably high, so you really needed to be a tyre fitter to hold the strings down. Nick Launay, the producer, showed me a great recording trick: he covered my plectrum with a thin layer of paper and stuck it on. The sound was pure Bowie – it had that dry strumming sound. I loved that."

**Did being new to the band impact your approach?**
"For me, the song is the most important thing, so play the song. The initial sessions for *Push The Sky Away* were in a studio in Brighton called The Toy Rooms. It was Nick, Warren, Barry Adamson, Thomas Wydler on drums and me on the guitar.

PHOTO BY JIM DYSON/GETTY IMAGES




PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTHONY OATES

A lot was going on instrumentally, and musically it was very dense. By the time I got to France, to La Fabrique, everything had been stripped back and it felt like a minimal electronic album, beautiful songs with loads of space, so I kept things simple, a 'less is more' kind of approach."

**What gear did you use once you got out on the road with the Bad Seeds?**

"For the live shows, I used an old 1966 Gibson ES-330 with a Lyre tremolo. I still use that for most of the older Bad Seed songs like *Red Right Hand* and *Tupelo*. I pulled out the Strat I used with John Squire and had a couple of standard Gibson J-45s for the acoustic songs.

"I also played a nylon-stringed Yamaha on *West Country Girl*. I used a couple of Fender Blues Deluxe amps, and the acoustics went through two AER Compact 60 amplifiers for onstage sound, just to lean back on. Effects-wise, I had a [J Rockett] Archer boost/overdrive pedal, Boss Blues Driver, Wampler [Mini Faux Spring] reverb, and a Boss Tremolo [TR-2]."

**Is recording with the Bad Seeds much different than doing film scores with Nick?**

"With the two scores I did with Nick and Warren, I played what I wanted to play. I went in there and did my thing. With The Bad Seeds, it's more considered and Nick gives more direction, as does Warren."

**Moving into the present, what sorts of gear are you deploying these days?**

"I've got some great vintage stuff. I have a beautiful 60s Gibson Everly Brothers, which I play in the *One More Time With Feeling* film, a great old L-50, and a couple of very rare Rickenbacker 360Fs. I used one on the Bandante single *Bang Bang* – it sounds huge.

"I have some Fender Custom Shop guitars, a Nocaster and a Jazzmaster that I've been playing recently. I bought a 70s Marshall 2060 Mercury amp, the little orange one. It has a great tremolo and looks amazing. My favourite pedals now are made by Crazy Tube Circuits: the Constellation [fuzz] and the Splash [reverb] are incredible, sonically."

**What are your short and longterm goals, and how do you plan to achieve them?**

"In the short term, a new Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds album is coming out this year [*Wild God*, due for release on 30 August], and there are live shows, too, so that's very exciting. I've also been working on a score for an HBO documentary with Dan Donovan, who was in Big Audio Dynamite, and we're also putting out a wild experimental album under the name 'Andromedae'.

"As for longterm goals, I want to make a solo album. I've got loads of songs that I'm recording, so yes, I want to get that out there and play some live shows. I also recently got up on stage with Dinosaur Jr in London at one of their *Where You Been* 30th anniversary shows. It was awesome, as nothing beats playing live!"

**2.** George is no stranger to the glorious jangle of a Rickenbacker. You can hear his Ricky 360F on *Bang Bang* from his Pink Floyd-esque band project Badante, with Kai Stephens and Sammy J Stopford

Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds' forthcoming album, *Wild God*, is due on 30 August via PIAS, supported by a European tour with UK dates from November
***www.nickcave.com***

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## BLUES/ROCK FOUNDATIONS WITH David Mead — level 1/5

This course will address all the skills you need to make sure-footed progress with your playing. Typical topics will involve mapping out the fretboard using the CAGED System, the major and minor scales you need to make your solos ignite, picking hand technique – specifically alternate picking and muting – fretting-hand skills like slurs, bends, double stops and vibrato, etc, and much more. We'll also look at the fundamentals of blues playing, both rhythm and lead, the 12-bar blues format and some of the common variations like the 'quick change' and 'riff blues'. But most of all, we're going to have fun!

## ACOUSTIC SONGS WITH Chris Quinn — level 2/5

This acoustic course promises to reveal how techniques from Robert Johnson through to Ed Sheeran will make you a better fingerstylist. Looking at guitar masters like Merle Travis, Jason Isbell, John Mayer, James Taylor and Paul Simon, you'll study important exercises and techniques that can give you that solid, timeless sound. You'll learn how to use these skills in modern guitar arrangements and for your own live performances. This inclusive week of workshops and group playing is aimed at lovers of quality songwriting, fingerpicking and guitarists wishing to take their acoustic playing to the next level.

## BLUES SONGS WITH Neville Marten — level 2-3/5

This in an inclusive get-together of guitarists on a quest to play and perform great blues songs. During a week of intensive but fun learning the collective talents of the group will put together four, possibly five great bluesy tracks both classic and modern. A solid degree of competence is required, such as ability with the major and minor pentatonic scales, blues scales and standard 7th chords, but everyone's abilities will be put to good use whatever their level. The student concert set list will be made from everyone's suggestions and they will be worked on from day one alongside technique and guitar tone considerations.

## ROCK 'N' ROLL WITH Jon Bishop — level 2-3/5

If you are looking for a good time course then look no further than rock 'n' roll. The rock 'n' roll style is an exiting blend of country, blues and rock with artists as diverse as Elvis (Scotty Moore), Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, Brian Setzer and Albert Lee will be studied. Your tutor Jon Bishop is perfectly placed to help you in your quest as he has recorded and toured for the past 16 years with UK rock 'n' roll legend Shakin' Stevens. Throughout the week, many iconic riffs and songs will be covered.

## JUMP BLUES WITH Chris Corcoran — level 2-3/5

Referencing the big sound of '40s & '50s R&B and Jump Blues guitar, this course will give a fresh perspective on how to add drive, style and invention. Licks, riffs and phrases will be covered as well as the styles of guitarists like Freddie King, Matt Guitar Murphy, Bill Jennings, Earl Hooker, T-Bone Walker, Tiny Grimes and Barney Kessel. Chris will also include examples and pointers of his signature chromatic blues style.

## GROOVE! WITH Jason Sidwell — level 2-3/5

Playing in time with energy and sophistication is what this involving course is about. Typical funk/soul artists include James Brown, Prince, Chic, Michael Jackson, Rick James and Earth Wind and Fire. The core topics will be rhythmic syncopation, chord vocabulary, octaves, double-stops, Dorian and Mixolydian mode usage and how best to interact with drums and bass. There will be additional modules that cover soloing over unique chord progressions (Stevie Wonder to Steely Dan) and deep dives into expanding alternate and hybrid picking techniques.

## BLUES WITH Andy Saphir — level 3/5

This course looks at the techniques, musical approaches and lick vocabulary used in electric blues lead guitar. By delving into the styles of blues guitar greats of the past and present like T Bone Walker, BB King, Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Joe Bonamassa and Kirk Fletcher, you will learn staple blues guitar approaches such as mixing minor and major pentatonics, string bending and double stops. In addition, the course looks at the theory behind some of those cool jazz sounding approaches used by players like Robben Ford, Larry Carlton and Josh Smith.

## ROCK WITH Jamie Hunt — level 3/5

For the rock course, key techniques like picking and legato plus phrasing approaches will be explored, ranging from classic acts such as ACDC and Black Sabbath through to modern players like Joe Satriani and Alter Bridge's Mark Tremonti. You will study typical scales and modes plus soloing approaches that enhance your familiarity with the fretboard and expand your vocabulary as a lead player. Alongside this, you'll explore equipment and tone settings that achieve chugging rhythm guitar tones and screaming leads. To bring it all together, numerous famous riffs will be enjoyed as well as three songs learnt for the closing student concert.

## JAZZ WITH John Wheatcroft — level 3/5

This course focuses on the exciting sounds of jazz, looking at players ranging from Wes Montgomery to John Scofield, George Benson to Mike Stern. We'll be covering a wide range of topics, ranging from accessible simple and direct ideas to more sophisticated and complex concepts, all framed into repertoire coming directly from the American Songbook. You'll learn immediately applicable ideas to expand your comping, melodic delivery, ensemble interplay, technique, improvisation and creativity.

## SINGING WITH Sara Davey — All levels

A course for all levels of singing. While teaching and reinforcing basic healthy singing habits Sara will help each singer to find their own style and unique voice. We will work on personal technique and skill, anatomy of the voice, one to one coaching, stage craft, improvisation harmony singing. There will be opportunities for soloing, duets and small ensemble acapella singing in addition to singing on stage with a band. Vocal students will have the opportunity to sit in on other guitar classes while one-to-one voice lesson slots are offered in the afternoon.

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THE Guitarist INTERVIEW

# LENNY KRAVITZ

Some 35 years since the release of his debut LP, for his 12th record, *Blue Electric Light*, Lenny Kravitz is back again with equal doses of vigour and vibes, using vintage guitars and the purest valve amps

**Words** Andrew Daly **Photography** Alex Alvarez

With his well-loved '53 Les Paul Goldtop slung over his shoulder and a pair of designer shades resting in place, Lenny Kravitz is the epitome of cool. Of course, having a cache of iconic songs at his disposal doesn't hurt his reputation, either. You've heard them before – cuts like *Are You Gonna Go My Way*, *Fly Away*, *It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over* and *Again* are just a few hits that have seen Kravitz become an icon of guitar and a key member of the cultural zeitgeist. But what truly sets him apart, as he prepares to unleash his 12th studio record, *Blue Electric Light*, is his open-mindedness. "I hope I'm remembered as someone who served the music. And also, for not having boundaries," he tells *Guitarist*.

"Whatever style, or whatever works for the song, you know, for the landscape of the song, I'm just open. A guitar is a boundless instrument; to shackle yourself would be a disservice," he continues.

Kravitz's latest record – which he states came to him via a combination of dreams, jam sessions and mental downloads – is refreshing. It's far too easy to get caught up in reinventing the wheel. But not Kravitz, who relishes guitar-into-amp vibes and keeps it pure.

"If I'm going to make a point" he says, "if I'm telling you something, an emotion, I can talk at you for two hours and give you a lecture, in which case you'll lose. That's because if I'm talking and talking and talking, I'll lose you . Or I can say a sentence that could change your life [and it] took just five words. It's the same thing with music..."

**Did the title track, *Blue Electric Light*, set the tone for this project?**

"That song actually happened at the end of the record. I had no idea it was coming; I had no idea I was going to name the album that. I woke up one night – I dreamt the song, as I do – and I went in and recorded it in the morning. And I thought it would be a great ending for the album and sequence.

"Then Craig Ross, the engineer of the album, was recording me and he said, 'You know, that's the title of the album...' I thought, 'Really?' because I was thinking about some other titles and had some things going around. But after a night of listening to the record with that song, I realised, 'Yes, that's the title.' It was the last thing that happened, as it [tends to be] in a lot of cases."

**"Whether in dreams or during the day – I'm an antenna. I pick up what's being transmitted to me"**

**Like most of your records, *Blue Electric Light* blends different genres, and with that, it probably has a lot of themes, right?**

"Well, the first track, *It's Just Another Fine Day (In This Universe Of Love)*, was the first track recorded for the album, which, for me, really set the tone. The drum machine, combined with these beautiful rhythm guitars, leads and orchestrations, was just a nice opening blend. That song started it all, but that doesn't mean it continued in that direction. As you've heard, it goes in many different sonic places. But that was the first track. That's when I realised, 'Okay, I'm starting an album. Something's going on here and I like the way this feels and sounds.'"

**Once you got going, what sorts of guitar sounds were swirling around in your mind?**

"Sometimes, it starts with a riff, but some songs are just written and you find the guitar parts within that structure. Most of the songs were written or conceived by me, picking them up as I do, whether in dreams or during the day – I always say I'm just an antenna. I pick up what I'm being given and what's being transmitted to me.

"There were a couple of instances when something came out of a jam; that's how *Paralyzed* was. One of those days in the studio, I just said, 'Craig, grab your guitar. I'm gonna get on the drums and let's just start playing. Let's just vibe out and see what happens.'

"We've written a lot of things in the past, including *Are You Gonna Go My Way*, where things came out of a jam session, and we're just finding things and then we stop and say, 'Okay, we need a bridge, we gotta figure out these chords, but this is the initial groove.' There's a couple like that, but otherwise the songs were just complete downloads to my mind."

**As far as your solos go, they're well placed and the phrasing is always great – you're very musical and it's not about showing off. So, from your perspective, what are the functions of solos within your music?**

"I mean, for me, personally, I like them to be simple and memorable and to give and evoke the emotion that I'm looking for. You don't have to play a lot of notes. For example, if you listen to the solos I play on *Paralyzed* or *Blue Electric Light*, they're simple and melodic. They have tension and they move the chord structure along nicely. But I like complicated things, too. It depends on what it is, but, for me, I'm trying to make the least amount of noise in the least amount of notes to make the point."

**What sort of guitars and amps do you rely on most to offer that sound?**

"I have my collection of vintage Les Pauls, Strats, 335s and my basses – Precisions and Jazzes. Those are my main studio guitars and I just depend on really pure sound.

"As far as my amps go, I have a 'Blackface' Fender Deluxe, that's probably my favourite studio amp. Dumble did it – it was one he did for me years ago, and he modified that Fender Deluxe for me, too. Then I have my Fender Tweed Deluxe, which I use a lot. I love to just turn them to 10, plugging right in and getting that saturated sound. I love that sound; I've been doing it since my first record [*Let Love Rule*, 1989]. I'll use a Marshall every now and again, but mostly it's small amps, like the Fenders or a Gibson Skylark. They sound the biggest when you record them properly."

1. A collection of vintage instruments came together to create the sound for *Blue Electric Light*, including this 1965 Stratocaster in Burgundy Mist

**To your point, small amps react well when you crank them to 10 and push them – you get a lot of natural break-up as a result.**
"Exactly. And I don't depend on pedals. Maybe if there's a lead and I need a little added texture, I'll use the pedal in that case. But all my rhythm sounds are just a guitar into an amp, with no processing whatsoever."

**Given the expanse of sounds and textures in your music, that might throw some for a loop.**
"I remember jamming with Prince once, and he was like, 'What is that effect you have on your guitar?' And I looked at him and said, 'Nothing. It's a guitar into a Deluxe, turned to 10.' He couldn't believe it. He was a guy that used a lot of processing and did it very, very well. But here he was: he thought it had some kind of effect, you know? I showed it that it was nothing, absolutely nothing."

**Throughout your career, you've managed to harness the magic that is a good Les Paul and a quality valve amp. This means people often think of you as a guitarist, which obviously has its merits, but you're a songwriter, too. What's the dividing line between 'Lenny the guitarist' and 'Lenny the songwriter'?**
"I see the whole thing as one exercise. For example, your assignment as a painter is to have a blank canvas and you get all these colours and brushes, and you make your expression, you make your painting, right? That's how I look at recording. I have a blank piece of tape, depending on whether I'm using tape or digital, whatever it is. I have this blank canvas and have to make something, so I'll say, 'Okay, I gotta grab a bass. I gotta grab a guitar, different guitars. I gotta layer them. I gotta play drums. I gotta play keyboards.'

"So I see it all as one exercise. And maybe that's because I do everything and I started out doing it that way. I don't see any walls between the different things. It's to get this thing that I'm hearing in my head to [actually] sound like what I'm hearing in my head.

"I think that's what I am and where my talent really lies; it's being the full, big picture, as opposed to saying, 'Oh, a virtuoso this, or a virtuoso that.' It's putting the whole thing together."

**How do you view the guitar scene today? Do you think there's too much focus on virtuosity and therefore not enough on musicality?**
"I think all of it is out there. But you do see the trends on Instagram with musicians where it's all about speed, you know? There's a lot of that, right? And, you know, James Brown used to say, 'Talking loud but saying nothing,' so you can play a million notes and have absolutely no sense of feel, rhythm or intensity. And then BB King could take one string, one note, one finger and knock over a fucking mountain, right? So I think musicians should be thinking more about feel, dynamics and emotion, if you're thinking about anything at all.

"I remember growing up in high school, and the one who could shred the fastest was the most impressive, but they weren't concerned with the rhythm part per se. So it could be one chord, a funk jam or whether you're playing like Bob Marley and the Wailers, and your job is that. Or it could be like if you're playing James Brown, and your job is to go in and do what that music requires and not move. That's your job. These guys who can play a million notes, 99 per cent of the time could not do those things deemed 'simple' because those things are *not* simple. To feel good and to groove is a gift unto itself."

2. Lenny's number one studio guitar is this 1953 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop conversion, which has been on every album since 1993's *Are You Gonna Go My Way*

**And that's something you have mastered over time: the art of not overplaying. That comes through years of doing it, though perhaps there is something to the idea that you're either born with it or not?**
"Yeah, if it's something I'm born with, then I've cultivated it over time. What's important to me is that, you know, you find a lot of people who would think, 'Oh, that's really simple.' I've had a lot of musicians come in to audition and to play in the band, and you give them the simplest part, and they think, 'Oh God, this is nothing,' but they can't play it.

"So it's always very hard; it's not always so simple. It's about the vibe and how you speak. And I love what I do. I'm very passionate about what I do in the studio. It's my favourite place to be. I love creating in the studio and putting these musical landscapes together. It's magic to me."

**"I've used my ['53 Goldtop conversion] for 30 years. The magic in it is that the pickups have a nice bite, a classic bite"**

Lenny purchased this Bourbon Burst 1961 Gibson ES-335 in Nashville on his last tour, inspired by his love for Earth, Wind & Fire's guitarist Al McKay, who played a 1972 335. It features on new track *Spirit In My Heart*

**"A guitar is a boundless instrument; to shackle yourself [to a style] would be a disservice"**

**Was there a particular guitar you used to record *Blue Electric Blue Light*?**
"I have a [Gibson] Goldtop conversion; it's a '53 and I bought it years ago [in 1992]. The first album I used it on was *Are You Gonna Go My Way* [1993], and it's been on every album since for over 30 years. It's my number one studio Les Paul. The magic in it is that the pickups have a nice bite, a classic bite."

**You've had PAFs installed on it...**
"They're cleaner pickups and they're so hot, which creates a really nice crunch. When you listen to things like Zeppelin or The Who, you think that the guitar is this gigantic, distorted thing. And you listen to the record, and you're like, 'Oh, wow,' but it's kind of smaller and cleaner than I thought it was."

**That goes back to your earlier point of not relying on pedals but rather the guitar going directly into the amp – and off you go.**
"Exactly, and that's what moves the air so well. When you congest the track with too much distortion, it takes up a certain space that may not have the same impact. You listen to a lot of Led Zeppelin records and it's a lot cleaner than you remember it in your mind. There's a real magic in that guitar that sounds so pure in many of the songs, whatever they may be. And that guitar is the guitar on the song *Are You Gonna Go My Way*."

**As far as your new record goes, which songs are you most proud of from a guitar perspective?**
"Hmm. Well, I like *TK421* for the funk aspect. It's really fun and it was great to play, and we have all these different rhythmic parts that locked together and created a groove. Then you have things like *Paralyzed*, where I broke out the voice box for the first time in a long time and did the solo on that."

**"I love creating in the studio and putting these musical landscapes together. It's magic to me"**

**As far as subtle highlights go, we really like the harmony solo on the track *Love Is My Religion*.**
"*Love Is My Religion* is where Craig and I played a harmony solo together for the first time ever. We've never done that, which is funny. It was like, 'Let's drop the rhythm and do that.' And what's cool is that, normally, you might keep the rhythm guitar part there and then solo over it. But because I wanted it to sound the same live, the bass carries the structure at that point, and Craig and I play the solo together in harmony. That was a nice moment."

**Looking at your career to this point, how do you hope that Lenny Kravitz, the guitarist and songwriter, will be remembered?**
"Just being remembered would be good enough, right? But to start, just that I'm someone who played from the heart and the soul. And that I'm someone that served the music. That's all I'm trying to do, just serve the music I hear in my head."

3. Lenny plays a '63 Stratocaster with a Sonic Blue finish in the control room of his home studio

Lenny Kravitz's latest record, *Blue Electric Light*, is out now on Roxie Records/BMG Rights Management

***www.lennykravitz.com***

# THE BERNIE MARSDEN COLLECTION

With a fabulous collection of the late Bernie Marsden's guitars, amps and other highly collectable music gear going under the auctioneer's hammer on 11 June, we were thrilled to have the chance of a sneak preview

**Words** David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker

If you're a fan of the late Bernie Marsden, then Gardiner Houlgate Auction Rooms in Corsham, Wiltshire is the place to be on 11 June. With over 250 lots comprising everything from high-end electrics and amps to pickups, prints, posters and other assorted paraphernalia, there's a chance for everyone to snag something from the collection. It's not all upper-tier equipment, either. On the contrary, alongside the vintage Gibson and posh PRS guitars there's humbler fare on offer, including several PRS SEs and the Fender Squier Stratocaster you see here, for instance.

When we were given the chance to have a look around the warehouse-sized storage facility that is currently the home of the collection at Gardiner Houlgate, we were spoilt for choice. Eventually, after opening many cases, we settled on a mere tip of the iceberg selection. We also took the advantage of sitting down with Luke Hobbs, the auction house's head of the guitar department, auctioneer and valuer, for additional insight into some of the amazing gear on offer.

## 1988 Korean Squier Stratocaster

**Estimate: £300 to £500**

When Bernie went into the studio to record his 2005 *Stacks* album, he went armed with a whole host of guitars – both vintage and modern – but ended up using this humble Squier for around 95 per cent of the sessions. Reputedly costing him an equally humble £125, Bernie is on record as saying that he found the Squier in a local music shop and picked it up because he liked the colour and that it turned out to be one of the best Strats he's ever played.

Luke Hobbs takes up the story: "I think, in the auction, it's almost my favourite guitar, personally, because of the story that it's got with it," he smiles. "Bernie turns up with this huge arsenal of guitars and that's the one he ends up recording most of the album on. And he had some phenomenal guitars to choose from. We all know how much of a good storyteller Bernie was, one of the greatest storytellers in rock 'n' roll, really, and that's one of them that features in his book, *Tales Of Tone And Volume* [Rufus Books, 2018]. It just goes to show how good these – what are considered budget, low-value Strats – can be. And I think now is the time to buy them because they are still obtainable. I think these Japanese- and Korean-made [Strats] from the late 80s, early 90s will be the next ones that will start creeping up to mid-hundreds-plus guitars in the future."

## 2000 John Cruz Masterbuilt Rory Gallagher Stratocaster

**Estimate: £4,000 to £6,000**

An interesting entry into the auction because this John Cruz Masterbuilt Strat predates the team-built Fender Rory Gallagher signature models that were officially launched in 2004. It's one of 40 models that preceded the official release, which adds a touch of limited-edition appeal into the sale. Superbly rendered relicing adds to the thoroughly battleworn allure of this guitar, but how did it end up in Bernie's collection?

"It was a fairly recent acquisition in Bernie's hands, I think," Luke recalls. "I seem to remember going to see him about a year or a year and a half ago and he seemed to indicate he hadn't had it long at

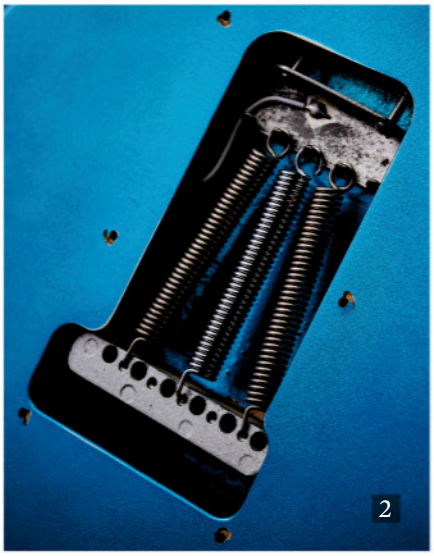
*"Bernie turns up with this huge arsenal of guitars and he ends up recording most of the album on the Korean Squier"*

Bernie's Rory Strat (left) and Korean Squier lean up against Lot 105, a 1964 Fender Bassman amp and cab that have been recovered in blonde Tolex

that point. He was a huge Rory Gallagher fan – he did the 'Bernie Plays Rory' tour [in 2010, following the album's release the year before]. I think he'd always wanted to acquire one and I think one of his friends was selling one, which is how he came to buy it. He liked the idea that it was almost like a pre-production one.

"Quite honestly, I didn't realise that they were a thing until Bernie presented me with this one," Luke continues. "Maybe four years previous to the production ones coming out. They basically took measurements of Rory's original Strat and made an accurate representation, all made by John Cruz, who was obviously at the time one of the biggest builders, and made 40 of them pre-production. It's a good representation of a rare collectible thing from the John Cruz era within the Custom Shop because he's no longer there."

1. The Rory Gallagher Strat was a limited edition of 40 Masterbuilt by John Cruz in 2000 and predates the official run of Gallagher signature Strats by four years




2. Used extensively on his 2005 *Stacks* album, the Korean Strat was set up to Bernie's preference with three springs in the vibrato cavity – and minus the original cover

## 1967 Gibson ES-335

**Estimate: £5,000 to £7,000**

This cherry finished Gibson ES-335 is in fine condition, with some natural finish-checking adding to its allure. But it holds a few mysteries – a couple of which may never be solved. For instance, who was it that reversed the neck pickup? Was the original owner a Peter Green fan, or did Bernie do it himself? Nobody seems to know. There are also a few other features that have been changed over the years.

"Again, this was a fairly recent acquisition," Luke tells us. "He wanted a later 335; he had earlier ones. It's difficult to remember, but four or five years ago he basically sent me some photos of it and said, 'What do you think of this?' He could see the obvious things that were wrong. It had had a neck refinish, the tailpiece that was on there had been changed. It would have had a trapeze tailpiece originally. So it's been converted to a stopbar. But it also looks like it's had some kind of Bigsby on there..."

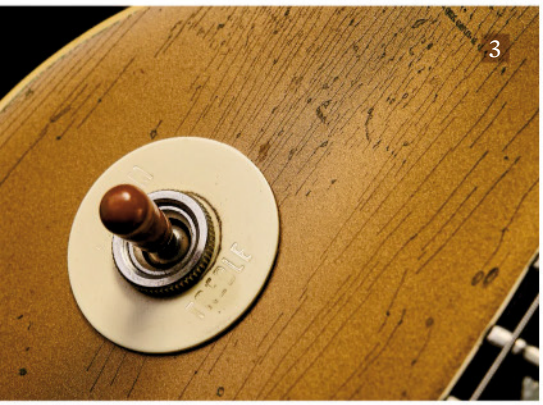
But was it Bernie who reversed the neck pickup, we wonder? "I actually don't know," Luke says. "Obviously, Bernie had a love of Peter Green. So, to me, there could be two things: maybe that was one thing that drew him to it when it came up for sale, but also he could have done it himself – it wouldn't surprise me at all. Before the September auction [postponed as a mark of respect because Bernie died less than a month before it was due to take place], he had a lot of his guitars set up and whether he said to his tech, 'I'll quickly swap it around' or whatever I don't know. But it is interesting. It's almost like it was meant to be."

## 1950s Gibson Goldtop Les Paul Conversion

**Estimate: £3,000 to £5,000**

If the ES-335 has some unanswered questions, then with this Les Paul the plot thickens considerably. An eBay find and certainly a curio from Bernie's collection, this Goldtop is thought to have been converted from a mid-50s original at some point in time. The neck has been replaced and what would have been a wrapover bridge has been swapped for an ABR-1 and stop tailpiece to give the guitar the appearance, at least, of a later 50s model. And Bernie continued modding it himself.

"He used this guitar quite a lot on his latest studio recordings as a go-to guitar,"




3. The 50s Les Paul, although not all original, has the kind of finish checking that befits an instrument that is around 70 years old

4. Bernie had several older ES-335s in his collection but wanted a much later one and managed to find this great example from '67

*"Bernie used this Goldtop guitar quite a lot on his latest studio recordings as a go-to guitar"*

The ES-335 and 1950s Les Paul recline against two Gibson amplifiers, both of which are circa 1960: a GA-6 Lancer (Lot 106, left) and a GA-20T Ranger (Lot 107)

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5. Although not owned by Bernie himself, the connection here is an obvious one – and they are Collector's Grade

6. The control cavity covers on both guitars have been hand-signed and numbered by Bernie

7. The headstocks on the guitars tell the story of their illustrious origin

8. Controls are three-in-a-row, the way Bernie liked them, and this configuration was echoed on the PRS SE versions, too

8

says Luke. "It now has some of his own signature pickups [Cream T Beastbuckers] fitted. When it came up for sale on eBay years and years ago, I think it was listed as a 50s Goldtop that had been re-necked, and then when he went to see the guy, the guy said as far as he knew it was an old 50s wraparound that had been re-necked by Gibson. I don't believe that for a second. I don't believe Gibson re-necked it, but I do believe it's an original Gibson body by measurement and just general spec. You can see where the [original bridge] posts have been taken out as well. It's had some refinishing, but there is some original gold paint on there.

"So it's just an interesting thing. I think he liked the fact that it was as old as it was, you know? An old plank of wood, basically, that he didn't need to be too precious about."

## 2015 PRS Bernie Marsden Signature models: #1 & #2

**Estimate: #1 £15,000 to £20,000; #2 £14,000 to £18,000**

Unlike the other guitars in the auction, this pair didn't belong to Bernie but are present because of the obvious connection. Numbers one and two of a very limited run of only six, they feature the highest appointments PRS's Wood Library can offer, including Brazilian rosewood fingerboards, curly maple binding, African mahogany backs... and just look at the figuring on the tops! Both are hand-signed and numbered by Bernie, too.

•

*"The owner got Bernie to sign them – not all of [those] available would have that signature on"*

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"Extremely limited numbers, no expense spared with CITES-certified Brazilian rosewood necks," Luke tells us. "The seller is someone that knew Bernie quite well and they were the first owner when they came out. And because she knew Bernie, she got him to sign them – '#1' and '#2' – and not all of the ones that would be available would have that signature on. The quality, as you've seen, is just out of this world. I think they're classy. I like the three-in-a-line control knobs. They're just a good, simple, classic design at the end of the day. The highest grade woods, the tops on them are just insane, deluxe cases... they even smell nice when you open the case! I think it's potentially a very good future investment."

*"Highest grade woods, the tops are insane… they even smell nice when you open the case!"*

The two PRS Signature Editions are companioned by a 2019 Marshall Bernie Marsden Signature JMP 1959HW Super Lead 100-watt head and matching cab in – what else? – white snakeskin Tolex

9. Well seasoned but quite possibly replacement tuners set off the rear of the 1930s Gibson L-1's weathered headstock...

10. ...and the front of the headstock bears the old Gibson logo. It's in great condition, despite being 90 years old

11. Luke Hobbs believes that Bernie used the L-1 in the studio and in some social media videos during lockdown

## 1930s Gibson L-1 Acoustic

**Estimate: £3,000 to £4,000**

As you can imagine, Bernie's love of the blues stretched back to the days of Robert Johnson and the other acoustic blues pioneers of the early 1900s. And so when he discovered this Gibson acoustic, he knew he had to add it to his collection. It bears the scuffs and scars that you'd expect on an instrument with around 90 years on the clock, but its authenticity as a blues machine from that classic era cannot be denied. It follows the standard build for a 1930s L-1 with mahogany back and sides and a rosewood 'board. Mainly all-original apart from the string pegs and very possibly the tuners, it's a fine example of a Gibson acoustic from the era.

"He liked small-bodied acoustic guitars and he was a big ambassador for blues guitar in general," says Luke. "He used to get a lot of guitars from a contact in the States – I'm not sure whether this was one of them – but he couldn't turn down the opportunity when this one came up because of the Robert Johnson connection of using smaller-body Gibsons. During lockdown Bernie put out a lot of videos of him playing in his garden, playing smaller-body guitars. And I'm sure this one would have been used in the studio as well for various blues numbers."

***Guitarist* would like to thank Luke Hobbs and Gardiner Houlgate for allowing us to photograph and spend time with these amazing instruments. For more information on the forthcoming auction, see www.guitar-auctions.co.uk/sale/216/the-bernie-marsden-collection**

*"Bernie liked small-bodied acoustic guitars and he was a big ambassador for blues guitar in general"*

It was Bernie's love for the early acoustic blues guitar pioneers like Robert Johnson that drew him to this fine example of Gibson's 1930s craft

# Pablo van de Poel

When a band from The Netherlands describes themselves as 'raw, psychedelic Southern rock', it may take a little cognitive processing to work out what that might mean. One listen to DeWolff, however, and you will be duly transported to the 60s for some fuzzed-out rock 'n' roll

**Words** David Mead
**Photography** Adam Gasson

DeWolff are a three-piece band comprising brothers Pablo (guitar and vocals) and Luka van de Poel (drums) with keyboard player Robin Piso. The band takes its inspiration from the tie-dye days of the late 60s, and they pull it off, too. The sheer enthusiasm for music that was made before any of them were born exudes from the stage, providing audiences with a mix of nostalgia and up-to-the-moment frenzied rock.

We caught up with Pablo as the dust was settling at the end of end of DeWolff's recent UK tour, a few days after playing at the Omeara in London. "I did have voice problems right around that time, but after all these years, I've kind of learned to just not worry about it," he tells us. "Every time, the last show of the tour is always the best one..."

Not only were the 60s a driving force in DeWolff's music, but the era influenced Pablo's taste in guitars, too. A long-time Gibson Firebird fan, he turned up at *Guitarist*'s studios clutching not one but two examples of Ray Dietrich's famous creation, as well as a pedalboard festooned with fuzz pedals...

**Where did your journey with the guitar begin?**
"I first started when I was eight years old. I was a massive Metallica fan; how that came to be I'm not entirely sure, but they were very popular at that time. Every hour or so there would be a Metallica video on the music channels on TV and, for some reason, I was attracted to the sound and the look and the guitars.

"My dad was singing in a covers band and so every chance I had, when I had school vacations and stuff, I would come along with him to rehearsals and I was always mesmerised by the sound and the look of the guitar. Their guitar player had a Gibson Les Paul, so that must have imprinted something in my psyche. I was determined I wanted to play guitar. I had to save up for one myself, so for a full year I saved all my money and I bought a Squier Telecaster."

**Did you take lessons?**
"Yes, I had to promise my parents that I was going to take lessons. So I took guitar ones and I was this Metallica kid, but my guitar teacher wanted me to read music, like *Old MacDonald Had A Farm*, stuff like that.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIEN DUPEYRON

I was not interested at all, but I was also a very polite kid so I just kind of played along. This teacher, I don't want to discredit him, but he kind of turned me off guitar playing. For some reason he thought it was a good idea to teach a nine-year-old metal kid *Old MacDonald*...!

"So, for a while, I took a lot more interest in skateboarding than guitar playing... until I discovered Nirvana when I was 11. [With] Metallica it was kind of like, 'I can't really play this stuff, it's pretty technically advanced,' but Nirvana was something that I could grasp. I figured out how to play *Smells Like Teen Spirit* and, of course, as a kid it gives you so much satisfaction to be able to play a song that you love. I think that's when I regained my passion for guitar playing, thanks to Nirvana."

**When did your love of 60s music begin?**

"When I was 13 my dad bought me a Jimi Hendrix compilation CD. He grew up in the 80s so he never experienced the music that came from the 60s [first hand]. He didn't know who Jimi Hendrix was, he just knew that people called him the best guitar player of all time, so he figured maybe I'd like it. At first I was like, 'Whoa, this is weird music...' But I played the CD over and over and over, until all of a sudden, it clicked. I heard *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)* and I was like, 'Wow, this is awesome.' That was basically my gateway to 'old music'. From there on, I discovered Cream and The Doors and Pink Floyd and The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. This all happened when I was 13 or 14 years old, and that was basically the start of everything for me."

**"I figured out how to play *Smells Like Teen Spirit* – as a kid it gives you so much satisfaction to be able to play a song you love"**

1. Pablo's early adventures with guitars included Squier, Fender, Samick and Danelectro, but then he discovered Firebirds and hasn't looked back!

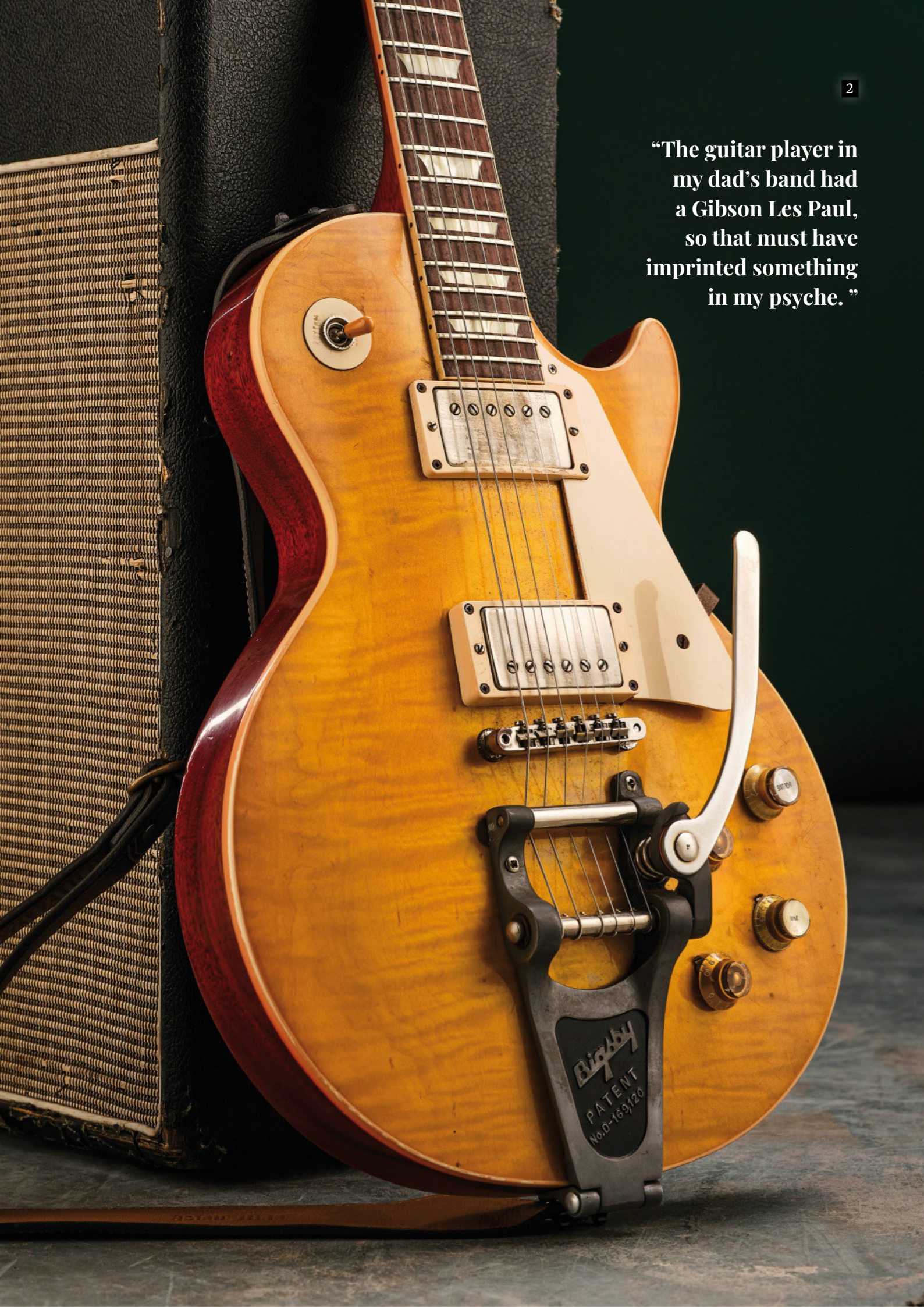
2. This Les Paul was originally loaned to Pablo by Gibson, but was eventually gifted to him by CEO Cesar Gueikian

**Did you start playing in bands soon afterwards?**

"I formed my first band when I was 12, right after I learned to play a couple of Nirvana songs. We played a Smashing Pumpkins song and also something that I think was the first song I ever wrote. We started out as a grunge thing, but when I discovered Hendrix we started shifting more toward rock 'n' roll. AC/DC was a big influence, too. By the time I was 14 or 15 we were playing some pretty big festivals here in the Netherlands, and when I was 16 I started my second band – and that was DeWolff."

**You've gone from that first Squier Telecaster to Gibson Firebirds. What came in between?**

"My second guitar was an Epiphone Les Paul Custom. That was because of Jimmy Page. Then I was really influenced by Rory Gallagher and so I needed a Strat. I saved up for a Mexican Strat that I still have somewhere. Then, because of Eric Clapton on the Cream farewell show at the Royal Albert Hall, I saw an ES-335 and I was mesmerised by the beauty of that guitar, but I could never afford a Gibson. So I bought a Samick 335 and that's what I used on the first DeWolff EP. Then I got an endorsement with Danelectro and so I played them for a good while. They sounded really good, but they weren't very comfortable guitars. So that's when I bought the Firebird reissue."




**“The guitar player in my dad’s band had a Gibson Les Paul, so that must have imprinted something in my psyche. ”**

Battleworn and bruised, Pablo's Firebird III reissue has been his faithful onstage companion for hundreds of gigs

**LES PAUL VS FIREBIRD!**

Watch Pablo demonstrate his guitars and pedalboard in our exclusive videos **http://bit.ly/guitaristextra**

Evidence of his love of 60s music, Pablo's pedalboard creates a maelstrom of fuzzed-out bliss for DeWolff's live set

**And since then you've added a vintage Firebird to your live setup. Tell us about it.**
"Yeah, I bought the reissue secondhand and I played it on every show and almost every recording for years and years and years, so it looks very beat-up, like an old one. The Firebird is like an extension of my body and so I figured I'm a Firebird guy. It's also kind of a unique guitar. The Firebird [reissue] I had played for so many years is a good guitar, but it's not a great guitar because it has almost no sustain. And, I don't know, there's just some things about it that make it a little hard to play. So then I figured if I want to be the Firebird guy, I gotta go for a vintage one, but they're always super expensive.

"I met up with a friend who's a vintage guitar dealer and he had this '65 Firebird III hanging on the wall. I played it and, even acoustically, it was one of the best guitars I'd ever played. The bottom half had broken off at some point and the headstock had broken off at some point, so it wasn't a valuable guitar. But he didn't want to sell it because it was his favourite guitar.

"Some weeks later, I dreamed about it and after that experience I was like, 'Oh my God, that's the Holy Grail!' After that my friend got a Firebird VII in the shop and he said to me, 'Hey, isn't this something for you?' I was like, 'No, man. What if you keep the Firebird VII and sell me the III?' A couple of days later, he was like, 'Pablo, I'll think about it...' Fast forward a couple of days later: 'All right, let's do it!' I had to promise that if I ever sell it I'll give him the first option. But yeah, I finally have my dream guitar."

3. After years of playing his Firebird reissue, Pablo was lucky enough to stumble into a great deal on this vintage model dating from 1965

**There's a bit of a mystery with the non-reverse headstock, isn't there?**
"Yeah, there are two scenarios. The first would be that Gibson was already well into transitioning to the non-reverse Firebirds and they put a non-reverse headstock on it. The other scenario is that the headstock broke on the way to the first dealer and they sent it back and, for some reason, they put on a left-handed headstock. There's a photo from the 70s of a guy in quite a famous Dutch band playing this guitar and it already had this headstock on it. Why I think it happened on the way to the dealer is because if I was a customer in the early 70s and my headstock broke, I would take it to a luthier and I wouldn't be okay with that luthier putting a left-handed headstock on my right-handed guitar. I would be like, 'No, you gotta fix it properly.' Whereas if they sent it back to Gibson, and Gibson does it, maybe it's like, 'Well, I guess it's okay then.'"

## "The Firebird is like an extension of my body and so I figured I'm a Firebird guy. It's also kind of a unique guitar"

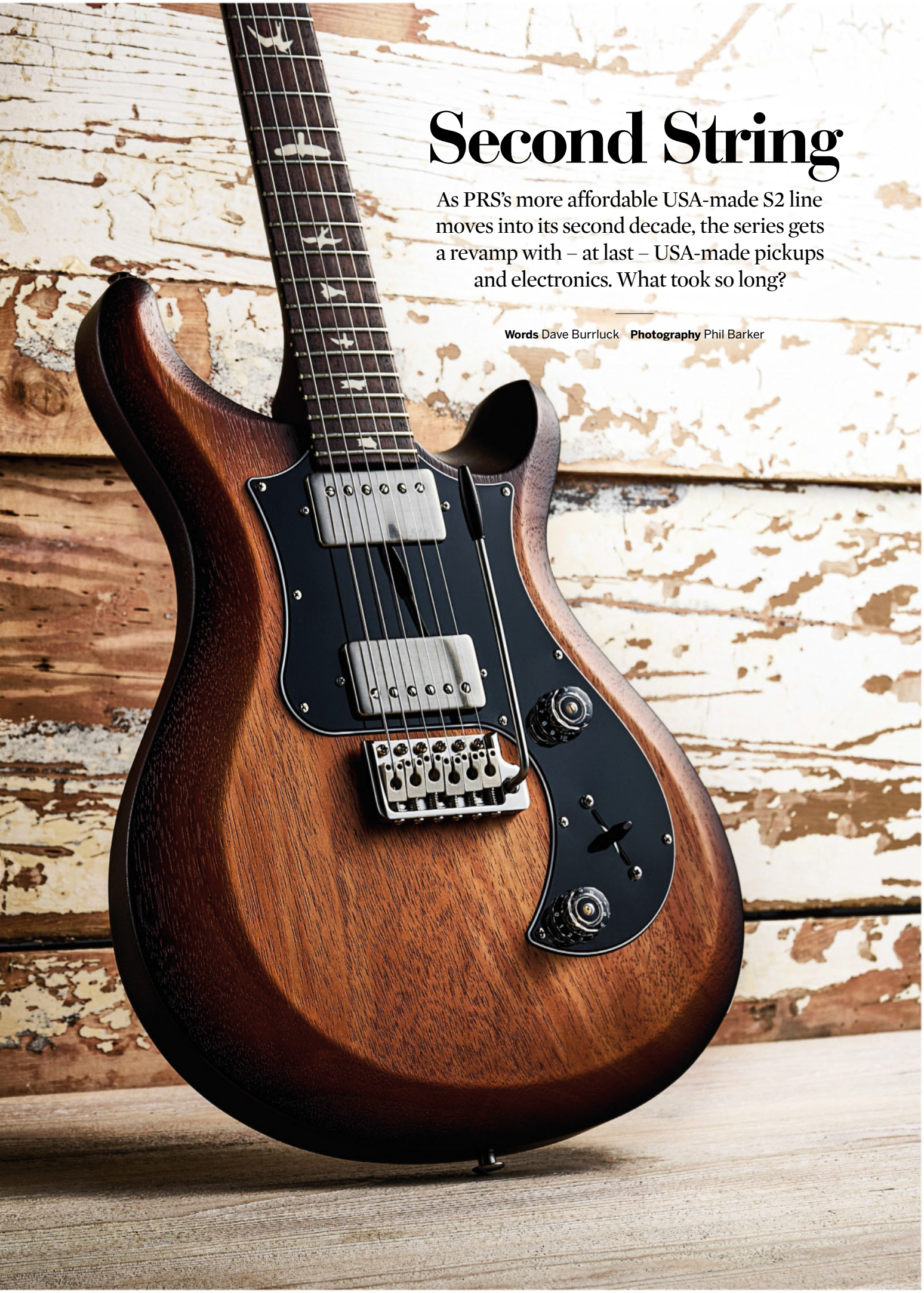
**You have three separate fuzz pedals on your 'board – the Jen Tone Bender and Isle Of Tone's Haze 65 and Luxe 64. How did you become such a fan of fuzz?**
"It started a long time ago, actually. When I got into Hendrix I was too young to understand how he got his sound. I just saw the guitar and amps and I thought that was it. So that intrigued me, but then I discovered The Black Keys. I loved Dan Auerbach's guitar tones on their early records and I discovered that he used fuzz to get his sound. So I looked on guitar forums to see what kind of fuzzes they were and I somehow got hold of an Analog Man Sun Face. Then, all of a sudden, I realised that you could clean it up and that's what all the old guys were doing, which I had never really understood before. I just started experimenting with that.

"Then, coincidentally, a guy from Spain – [César de Vicente of] LofiMind Effects – sent me a message. He was like, 'I'm making this fuzz and I want you to try it,' and he sent it to me. I had an instant connection and was like, 'Oh, this is great. I can dial in these sweet clean sounds but also just over the top, gritty distortion.' Then that broke down and I borrowed an Isle Of Tone fuzz from someone and the Isle Of Tone guy saw a video of me and he sent me a couple of fuzzes. I've become good friends with Joe [Huber] from Isle Of Tone and that really got me into the fuzz game."

**What's next for DeWolff?**
"We're gonna record a new album in May at Fame Studios in Alabama – the original studio where Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin recorded, and where the first Allman Brothers rehearsal ever took place. And then we're going to spend a week at the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, where *Brown Sugar* and *Wild Horses* were recorded and some Willie Nelson records, too. So that's gonna be really exciting!"

DeWolff's latest album, *Love, Death & In Between*, is out now via the Mascot label

***www.dewolff.nu***



# Second String

As PRS's more affordable USA-made S2 line moves into its second decade, the series gets a revamp with – at last – USA-made pickups and electronics. What took so long?

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

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## What You Need To Know

1. **These look cheap for USA-made PRS guitars.**
We're not sure 'cheap' is the right word, but, yes, the S2 line is around half the price of the top-level Core line models, although they're still made in PRS's Stevensville factory in Maryland.

2. **But don't the S2 models use the same pickups and hardware you'll see on the things like the £499 SE CE Satin?**
They did, but that's the proposition for this 2024 refresh. While in some cases the new models use the same hardware as the SE and USA CE models, the S2 guitars will all now feature USA-made pickups and wiring – just like the Core line.

3. **So, they're just satin finishes – where's the flame maple gone?**
There are four all-mahogany satin-finish models; the other nine S2s are gloss-nitro finished. Figured maple tops are used on the gloss-only Custom 24, Custom 24-08, McCarty 594 and Singlecut McCarty 594.

For its first 16 years of production-guitar making, PRS only made its instruments in the USA. When the company finally began to offer the 'offshore' Korean-made SE models – now made in Indonesia – it gave the brand a new, much lower price point but also created a large hole, price wise, in between. From its launch in 2013, the USA S2 line aimed to fill that gap: the essence of PRS, still built alongside the all-singing, all-dancing Core level in Maryland.

The thing is, to achieve the much lower price point, not only was it necessary to streamline and simplify the build process, but the S2 guitars still used pretty much the same hardware, pickups and electronics that feature on those offshore-made SE guitars, which, as we reported back in issue 510, now kick off at £499. For some, that was an uneasy mix.

However, last year's 10th Anniversary S2 models – the limited-edition Custom 24 and McCarty 594 – signalled an impending

The previous S2 Satin models used dot inlays. For 2024, it's these solid birds only. Unlike the Core models, the S2 fingerboards are inlaid and fretted before the fingerboard is glued to the neck

switch to USA-made pickups. Now for 2024, the *entire* S2 line uses USA pickups and electrics. However, it's more of a refresh: aside from those USA components, the range stays exactly the same with a couple of minor specification changes.

As before, the 2024 S2 line – which all feature glued-in (not bolt-on) necks – kicks off with a quartet of the far-from-posh satin-finished models: the Standard 22 and Vela Semi-Hollow, plus the two models we have here, the Standard 24 and solidbody Vela. The Vela was introduced in 2016 and is the only S2-specific model and PRS's only offset. The guitars start at £1,925, considerably less than the Core guitars, which currently start at just over £4k. Half the money, half the guitar? Let's take a look.

## Standard Style

As PRS aficionados will know, 'Standard' refers to the all-mahogany style, although today, with that lowly SE CE Standard Satin or the SE Standard 24-08, it can simply refer to an all-mahogany body without a maple top and with a maple neck. But the S2 Standards stick with prior art: they're all mahogany. There are no Standard models in the Core line-up and no satin finishes. In fact, these start-up S2s are the only current satin-finished guitars in the entire PRS range, with the exception of that recent SE CE Standard Satin.

From the moment you pull one of these start-up models out of its gigbag, the open-pore satin-finish style shouts out to the working musician, even though for this year the classic dot inlays of the previous S2 satin-finished models now revert to the ubiquitous bird inlays.

All the S2 models use a different top-carve, coined an 'asymmetric bevel' by PRS, which was first seen on the Mira and Starla models. This more SG-inspired style means the body thickness drops to 43mm

1. On one of the most identifiable headstocks in the industry, the three-a-side tuner placement means the strings straight-pull over the friction-reducing nut. The only S2 identifier on the guitar is the subtle legend on the truss rod cover

2. These top-locking enclosed tuners are actually available as an upgrade for the SE line. PRS has never displayed the country of origin on its USA-made guitars, only the Indonesian-made SEs

3. These S2 Standards are all-mahogany. The full-width neck glues into the body, under the neck pickup, just like the original PRS guitars of 1985. Classic stuff!

thick overall, although it becomes really quite Fender-like in playing position, with that large bass-side bevel to the top, plus a ribcage contour on the back.

The other main constructional change to the S2 guitars is the neck, which uses a scarfed headstock and heel block, rather than the one-piece design of the Core models. While this three-piece construction is easily visible on PRS's bolt-on models, such as the CE or Silver Sky, you can slightly see the heel blocks here but not that headstock scarf. In fact, if the spec sheet didn't tell us otherwise, we'd swear it wasn't there.

Both guitars look and feel very much like working tools, and their thin finishes will mark and begin to 'age' very quickly in use

PRS's original 635mm (25-inch) scale length is used throughout the S2 range, with the exception of the shorter scale used on the three McCarty 594 models, which are also the only models with fingerboard-edge binding. Those shiny gloss-finish models will also look and feel very different from our models here where the finish sinks into the pores of the mahogany, which clearly isn't grain-

4. The four-pole five-way switch dominates the Standard's scratchplate, but you can also see the treble bleed capacitor on the volume control

5. These Core-level components add to the uplift of the USA pickups on both the Vela here and the other 2024 S2 models

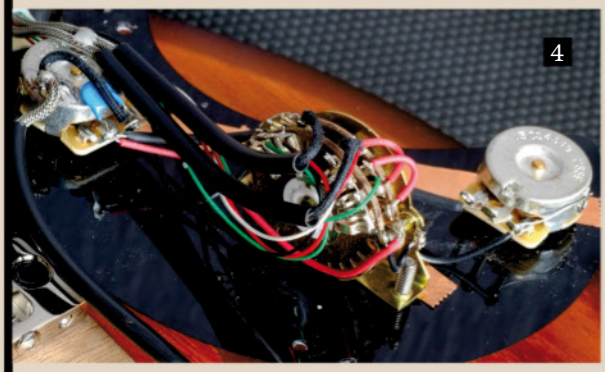
## UNDER THE HOOD

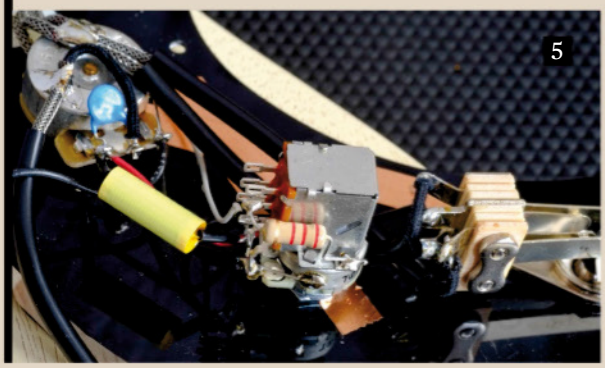
### We're promised USA pickups and electrics. What do we get?

The scratchplate-mounted pickups and electrics mean it's only the side-mounted output jack that isn't part of the assembly. Removing the Vela's 10-screw plate you see that the neck cavity is routed for a humbucker, not just the smaller Narrowfield, plus the full-width neck tongue sits into the body (as is usual for a PRS), across the full width of the rout. And, yes, the components certainly ape those in a typical Core level model. The volume pot has a nominal 500kohms value and uses PRS's standard 180pF treble bleed capacitor; the tone cap appears to be the standard IC .033µf, while the pull-push pot, again rated at 500k, also uses a 2.2k resistor to achieve the partial coil-split. The right-angled toggle switch appears to be Switchcraft.

When the Vela launched in 2016 it used the Starla's bridge pickup and the Type-D single coil at the neck. When PRS decided to increase the output of the Starla's bridge pickup, the Vela retained the original (lower-wind), which became known as the DS-01 (DS apparently stands for dual or double slug), while the new hotter Starla pickup was named the DS-02. The Vela's USA pickup retains that name and, of course, the neck single coil is replaced by the Narrowfield humbucker; both pickups are clearly labelled Vela Treble TCI and NF TCI at the neck. The bridge pickup has a measured at output DCR of 7.08k (4.88k when split) and the neck pickup is 6.8k.

The Standard 24's nine-screw scratchplate swaps the three-way toggle and pull-switch for a four-pole, five-position lever switch, again with the same capacitors as the Vela. The USA 58/15 LT pickups here (the LT suffix stands for 'low turns') have brushed nickel covers with the pickup name engraved in one corner. The pickups' backs confirm that, and both are clearly marked with the TCI suffix on the brass baseplates. Measured at output, the DCR of the bridge is 7.08k; the neck 6.97k.





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filled. We could argue these might be too utilitarian for the PRS fanbase, but one major thing that's always been central to the PRS proposition is the perfect craft – and that's very evident here.

## Hardware

Both guitars use the brass-post, top-locking 'Low-Mass' tuners (available as retrofits for the SE line) and two different bridges. The Standard 24 employs the moulded (we'd say cast) not machined all-steel vibrato used on the SE and the USA CE models that's based on the original PRS vibrato design, while the 'plate-style' bridge was engineered specifically for the Vela and is also used on the £3k NF53 and Myles Kennedy signature models. It's a classy format that dates back to pre-production PRS designs and uses two brass barrel saddles angled to allow pretty much bang-on intonation. The baseplate is nickel-plated steel and the strings top-load in keyhole slots behind the saddles.

Finally, we get to the new bits: the USA pickups. Our Standard 24 uses the 58/15 LT treble and bass humbuckers like the majority of the range, with the exception of our Vela, which goes for the DS-01 humbucker at the bridge and a Narrowfield humbucker at the neck, the Custom 24, which uses 85/15 treble and bass 'buckers, and the Custom 24-08, which features the narrow TCI humbuckers.

## Feel & Sounds

As we've often expressed, the faultless gloss-finished craft, not to mention the cost, of PRS's Core guitars means that we're almost scared to actually test them. It's the opposite here. Both these guitars look and feel very much like working tools and, of course, their thin finishes will mark and begin to 'age' very quickly in use.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, bearing in mind their similar size and materials, there's quite a weight variance: the Vela

**6.** These covered 58/15 LT humbuckers are the draw here – they're exactly the same as those featured on the top-level Core models. PRS doesn't tell us what's under the cover, but the 58/15 has always chased a more vintage vibe

**7.** Previous Vela models have used the well-liked Type-D single coil at the neck, which is replaced here by PRS's USA Narrowfield as used on the Myles Kennedy Signature and the Core-level Special Semi-Hollow and Studio, for example

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8. Based on the original pickup used on the USA Starla, this new DS-01 is a regular-sized humbucker with its exposed slug polepieces. It can be partially split to single coil: think classic with attitude!

9. Used on the SE models as well as the USA CE 24, this all-steel vibrato is more than fit for purpose. Combined with the friction-reducing nut and locking tuners, it's very stable, tuning-wise. A now-classic design

## THE RIVALS

**Gibson has been tweaking its Modern Collection recently and the satin-finish Les Paul Modern Lite kicks it off at £1,499. The proper LPs start with the new satin-finish Modern Studio (£1,999), slightly thinner than the full-fat models. Both use the same pickups: the Lite has standard wiring, the Studio has four pull-push pots. There's some SG vibe to the S2 models, and the SG Standard is good value at £1,699.**

**The S2's scratchplate style nods to Fender's modular production style. The American Pro II Telecaster Deluxe (£1,899) uses two V-Mod II Double Tap humbuckers, four controls and a toggle-switch pickup selector – a 'Gibson' in Fender dress!**

**Godin's Canadian-made electrics offer crisp build and, although more LP in style, the Summit Classic (£1,549) is a good alternative to the big guns.**

comes in at a very light 2.65kg (5.83lb), while the Standard 24 is heavier but far from overweight at 3.39kg (7.46lb). And while weights aren't specified, neck profiles are: our Standard 24 goes for the Pattern Thin, the Vela the Pattern Regular. The difference? Well, the Regular is slightly thinner at the nut – 42.06mm as opposed to 42.86mm, PRS tells us – and the Thin is thinner in depth at the nut at 19.84mm, as opposed to the Regular's 21.43mm. Our measured dimensions support that with the Vela's nut width measuring 42mm; the Standard 24's is 43.2mm. In terms of 1st-fret depth, the Vela measures 21.5mm, the Standard 24 is 21.1mm, and at the 12th fret we get 23.5mm on the Vela and 22.8mm on the Standard. Both necks have a pretty classic 'C' profile, the same fingerboard radius and frets (which we measured at 2.66mm wide and 1.14mm high), and that same slightly in-turning curve and rolled edge to the fingerboard edges. Put simply, they're not a million miles apart in feel. Likewise when strapped-on: while the extended upper shoulder of the Vela gives slightly more of a Strat-y vibe, both feel exceptional, not least with the lower profile bevelled-edge body.

And yet while the scale length and construction might be the same, the combination of the different bridges, different pickups and the way they're wired

> In PRS's post-TCI pickup world, any concerns around imbalances are a thing of the past

give us two quite distinct voices, albeit with plenty of similarity. First off, there's not a bad sound to be had from either. We're not reaching for the tone control to pull down excessive highs; there aren't any. In PRS's post-TCI world, those imbalances are a thing of the past.

The Standard's 58/15 LT pickups offer classic, quite beautiful and very musical humbucking voices. They're not overpowered, but they don't sound weak or thin at the bridge or over-thick and sludgy at the neck, either. In part due to its placement after the 24-fret neck, the neck pickup has nice clarity to the attack, which sounds very vocal, clear and soulful. Kick in a boost and blues rockers worldwide will be at home for their expressive solos.

Back to the bridge and there is a little snarl to the attack, but it's certainly not over-thin and is very responsive to your pick attack: pull back and you could be playing a single coil; dig in and the sound matches you. The two inner single coils (position 4) throw

# Quality Time

With a total of 13 models covering some diverse styles, pickups and colours, the S2 line-up is quite the self-contained range

**Words** Dave Burrluck

## VELA SEMI-HOLLOW SATIN £2,079

The Semi-Hollow Satin variant of our reviewed Vela will no doubt be another lightweight guitar. Aside from the different body construction, though, everything else is the same, including the bridge and pickups. If satin's not your bag, there are five 'Standard' nitro gloss colours at £2,259.

## STANDARD 22 £2,050

A subtly different ride from the 24 we have on review, this Standard 22 model otherwise sticks to the same specifications and is also available in five Standard gloss colours (including this Antique White) and, of course, four satin nitro hues (at £1,925). The gloss finish Standard 24 is the same price, too.

## CUSTOM 24 £2,465

Sticking to PRS history, the Custom 24 adds a maple top but keeps the same asymmetric bevel carve. We also get the USA 85/15 humbuckers, but otherwise the specs and controls are the same as our reviewed Standard 24. This is a gloss-only model and comes with six 'Custom' colours.

## CUSTOM 24-08 £2,575

This maple-topped model, with mahogany back and neck, tweaks the Custom 24 recipe by adding the narrower TCI humbuckers – as used on the Core level 24-08 and the Paul's Guitar – which are selected by a three-way toggle. Each TCI pickup is switchable by its own mini-switch to voice 'true single coil' mode.

## MCCARTY 594 £2,675

Effectively the more vintage-style strand of the line-up, the 594 uses the same maple-topped construction as the S2 Custom 24 but with two fewer frets, a slightly shorter scale, four controls and the two-piece bridge array from the £4k-plus Core models. The slightly thinner-bodied McCarty 594 Thinline (£2,359) is all-mahogany, and all the S2 594s employ the new 'wing' buttons on the non-locking tuners.

## MCCARTY 594 SINGLECUT £2,675

The single-cutaway version of the 594 recipe is otherwise the same spec as the double-cut model, including the Pattern Vintage neck profile and bound fingerboard. In terms of hardware, pickups and electronics, it's a dead ringer for the Core-level Singlecut, which is priced from £4,620. Again, there's a choice of six gloss specific colours for the maple-topped 594s.

10. The Vela uses exactly the same bridge that's on PRS's £3k T-inspired models: the strings top-load into the steel baseplate and the two big brass saddles add to the Telecaster-style vibe

us across to the Fender-y tracks – a little bit Tele, little bit Strat. Position 2 does the same but with a slight extra push, while the twin-humbucker mix is fuller yet still has that parallel-wired bounce.

As for the Vela's voice, at the bridge it's a little more snarly without touching our amp or pedalboard, like a good Filter'Tron but without the shrill highs, though there's nothing dark or over rounded here. It's definitely a bit more roots-rock, with a little more character. The partial split (which primarily voices the slug coil) is especially good, too, nodding back to a Tele, and certainly not over-thin or anaemic. The Narrowfield at the neck actually sounds very slightly thicker than the 58/15 LT of the Standard 24 and not as overly focused as the narrow aperture might suggest. It's a big voice on this platform and both mixes are delicious. That single coil character of the split humbucker with the Narrowfield is particularly good, with the mismatch of styles working in its favour.

11. A simple but versatile drive, the five-way selector switch of the Standard mixes humbucker and single coils effortlessly with master volume and tone controls

## Verdict

Over the past decade the S2 range has offered not only more affordable USA guitars but ones that have their own, arguably more 'alternative' style with that simplified bevel top and those big scratchplates. Of course, PRS Core lovers might see them as a bit cut-price, considering that up to this point the S2s have used the same pickups, electrics and hardware as the SE guitars. Now, while the 2024 refresh includes pukka US pickups and electrics, it also comes with a £300 price rise on our samples, just under 20 per cent. To be honest, that doesn't seem excessive – how much is a posh set of pickups and a new wiring loom? – but, on paper at least, it does make these quite simple satin-finish guitars seem a little pricey. Nevertheless, the immaculate craft and lutherie on display is unmatched and the workhorse

12. There are fewer sounds than the Standard here as you can't split the neck-placed Narrowfield, but the simple three-way toggle selector switch, master volume and tone (which has a pull-switch to split the bridge humbucker) still cover a lot of ground

style is enhanced by quite exceptional, wide-ranging sounds.

The classic Standard 24 really has its roots in the very early days of PRS and is a no-brainer for the working musician who needs to coax humbucking and single-coil sounds from one guitar. It's effortlessly in tune and has one of the best vibratos out there (irrespective of where it's made). The Vela is now a real outlier in the PRS range; the Mira and Starla have been shelved, leaving this one guitar to appeal to a potentially large group of players. To PRS, it's just one arrow in a pretty full quiver and does seem rather isolated. But for the roots-rockers out there, it's a seriously good musical tool. Maybe PRS should start an off-shoot company in Seattle that just makes Velas with funky finishes, a vibrato option and all sorts of boutique garb...

In the meantime, any guitar maker anywhere in the world needs to check out the craft here. 40 years on, PRS is still setting standards that other brands would do well to study very closely. G

## Over the past decade the S2 range has offered more affordable USA guitars with their own more 'alternative' style

### **PRS** S2 STANDARD 24 SATIN

**PRICE:** £1,925 (inc gigbag)
**ORIGIN:** USA
**TYPE:** Double-cutaway solidbody electric
**BODY:** Mahogany with 'asymmetric bevel' top carve
**NECK:** Mahogany, pattern regular profile, glued-in
**SCALE LENGTH:** 635mm (25")
**NUT/WIDTH:** Friction reducing/43.2mm
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius
**FRETS:** 24, medium
**HARDWARE:** PRS vibrato (cast), PRS Low Mass locking tuners – nickel-plated
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm
**ELECTRICS:** PRS 58/15 LT Treble and Bass humbuckers, 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.39/7.46
**OPTIONS:** Colour only
**RANGE OPTIONS:** There's also a 22-fret Satin version (same price), plus both 22 and 24 fret Standards are available with gloss finishes at £2,050
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No
**FINISHES:** McCarty Tobacco (as reviewed), Vintage Cherry, Charcoal, Antique White – open-pore satin nitrocellulose

Guitarist CHOICE

**9/10**

**PROS** Less posh workingman style; versatile and high-quality classic sounds; effortlessly in tune; superb playability and vibrato system

**CONS** Very hard to fault in craft or sound, though it's a shame PRS ignores the left-handed community

### **PRS** S2 VELA SATIN

**PRICE:** £1,999 (inc gigbag)
**ORIGIN:** USA
**TYPE:** Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric
**BODY:** Mahogany with 'asymmetric bevel' top carve
**NECK:** Mahogany, pattern regular profile, glued-in
**SCALE LENGTH:** 635mm (25")
**NUT/WIDTH:** Friction reducing/42mm
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius
**FRETS:** 22, medium
**HARDWARE:** PRS 'plate style' top-load bridge, PRS Low Mass locking tuners – nickel-plated
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm
**ELECTRICS:** PRS DS-01 (bridge) and PRS Narrowfield (neck) humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (with pull-switch to split the bridge pickup only)
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.65/5.83
**OPTIONS:** Colour only
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The Vela Semi-Hollow Satin costs £2,079. Both solid and semi-solid Velas are available with a gloss finish at £2,259
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No
**FINISHES:** Antique White (as reviewed), Vintage Cherry, Charcoal, McCarty Tobacco – open-pore satin nitrocellulose

Guitarist GOLD

**10/10**

**PROS** Unique-to-PRS offset design; superb craft throughout; vibe-y bridge pickup voicing; surprisingly big-sounding neck voice, glorious mixes; very in tune; lightweight

**CONS** We miss the dot inlays here – but, hey, it is the anti-PRS guitar

# Horses For Courses

Some guitars hit the sweet spot of do-it-all versatility and real-world price points. Here are a dozen that will have you covered, regardless of your budget

**Words** Stuart Williams

## **SQUIER** PARANORMAL ESQUIRE DELUXE £375

What's cooler than a regular Tele? A Telecaster with a 70s-style full-face scratchplate. In fact, this poplar-body/maple-neck reimagined Esquire tells the tale of Leo's blueprint model, had it been designed 20-odd years later. As such, it's got a Wide Range humbucker, but there's some switching tricks up its sleeve with a coil-split as well as control bypass positions on the three-way rotary control. Get it in the none-more-70s Mocha or Metallic Black finishes.
**www.fender.com**

## **GRETSCH** G2215-P90 STREAMLINER JUNIOR JET CLUB £399

This model boils down everything we're after in a multi-purpose single-cut to a, frankly, ridiculous price. Let go of your 'tonewood' snobbery; £399 gets you more than a taste of the Gretsch vibe, with a Broad'Tron BT-2S humbucker at the bridge, the added 'neckiness' of a P-90 in the neck position, simple master volume/tone controls, and a rock-solid wraparound compensated bridge.
**www.gretschguitars.com**

## **GORDON SMITH** GS1 FROM £999

There are workhorses and then there are oxen – and the Gordon Smith GS1 is the latter. Built to keep going forever with few 'frills' but plenty of thrills, the base spec uses an open-pore natural finish, with mahogany all round and a rosewood 'board. The single humbucker is an in-house GSG, but you can personalise your GS1 in nearly every way, from the neck profile down to the string gauge, with 24 selectable options on the website.
**www.gordonsmithguitars.com**

## **SHERGOLD** TELSTAR STANDARD ST14 £379

The Telstar Standard will draw you in with its slightly slanted T-style looks, including that poplar body's raised centre channel and enough metal to make Jaws feel inadequate. But you'll stay after the realisation that this guitar is packing some serious rock 'n' roll tone, straight from the brain of Patrick James Eggle at just £379. The Page FilterSonics lean towards traditional 'bucker tone but cover a lot of ground; we love the contoured neck heel, too.
**www.shergoldguitars.com**

## **PRS** SE CE 24 STANDARD SATIN £499

PRS is making guitar-buying decisions easy with a model seemingly on every rung. Here, the SE CE 24 is whittled down to a Standard series with a satin finish, carved mahogany body and bolt-on maple neck with rosewood 'board (plus bird inlays). It has 24 frets and includes a PRS vibrato and 85/15S Treble and Bass humbuckers, complete with coil-splitting, once again proving the SE range represents some of the best-value guitars in their price bracket.
**www.prsguitars.com**

## **CHARVEL** PRO-MOD RELIC SAN DIMAS STYLE 1 HH FR PF £1,259

Charvel remains true to its Californian hot-rodding roots with this new Relic edition San Dimas Style 1, which looks like it's been pulled from bits wombled off the Sunset Strip sidewalk circa 1985. The neck features graphite reinforcement and a compound radius 'board, and you get a JB/'59 pairing, plus, of course, a Floyd Rose. Available in Weathered Orange, Black or White.
**www.charvel.com**

## **PJD** CAREY STANDARD £1,299

The Carey Standard from PJD is really pushing the limits of what can be done on these shores without busting the bank. The lightweight obeche body, dressed in nitrocellulose, removes the dreaded single-cut spinal curve, while the bolt-on maple neck is nicely contoured and fitted with 22 Jescar frets. You get a Gotoh hardtail bridge and tuners, and the combination of PJD Wadfather and Parkins Cream P-90 pickups will handle most scenarios.
**www.pjdguitars.com**

## **MANSON** MA JUNIOR £1,399

Manson's UK-made single-pickup Junior range is by no means 'barebones'. The MA body shape is lightweight and comfortable, and it's sleek in that Dry Satin Black finish. The comfort continues with the maple neck and its 'soft-V' profile (with a plain rosewood 'board). But while the Manson Dirty Rascal humbucker is on its tod, there's series/parallel switching for its coils via the Mojo switch as well as a kill button. Plus, Gotoh hardware and a Mono gigbag.
**www.mansonguitarworks.com**

## **GIBSON** LES PAUL JUNIOR £1,499

If one guitar were to define the 'workhorse' concept, it would be the Gibson Les Paul Junior. It's made its name thanks to its ability to work in pretty much any situation from rock 'n' roll to reggae. The secret is simple: a slab mahogany body with a mahogany neck, rosewood 'board and, of course, a single P-90 pickup in the bridge position. Gibson still offers it today, and we can't see that changing. Simplicity at its finest.
**www.gibson.com**

## **FENDER** AMERICAN PERFORMER STRATOCASTER £1,349

This American Performer places the hallowed US-made Fender double-cut at a working-musician price. We get a classic alder body, C-shaped maple neck with rosewood or maple (Satin Lake Placid Blue only) 'boards, and a six-saddle vibrato-equipped bridge. The magic is in the electronics, with Yosemite single coils wired to a five-way switch, and Fender's 'Greasebucket' circuit.
**www.fender.com**

## **GIBSON** LES PAUL MODERN LITE FROM £1,449

If Gibson's Junior is too sparse, consider what we'll call the 'adolescent' Les Paul Modern Lite – a US-made LP with all the appointments we need and none we don't (say goodbye to the maple cap). Gibson's trimmed down the body to 45mm thin, and our review model was a shoulder-pleasing 3kg (6.67lb). Throw in a pair of USA pickups (490R/498T) and you've got yourself a classic rock machine for years to come. Look out also for the Modern Studio at £1,999.
**www.gibson.com**

## **NIK HUBER** KRAUTSTER III FROM £3,595

A workhorse guitar doesn't mean you need to forego luxury, so says Nik Huber with the Krautster III. Its Dolphin morphed T-style/single-cut mahogany body – stylishly outlined with binding – is attached to a bolt-on curly maple neck, with a rosewood fingerboard. Electronically, there's a Nik Huber Krautster humbucker (by Häussel) in the bridge position and a Häussel P90 '1956' single coil at the neck. There are plenty of customisation options, too.
**https://nikhuber-guitars.com**

# Low Side Of The High Road

Mainstream guitars are getting surprisingly expensive – while prestige brands are offering no-frills electrics for very tempting prices. Which should you buy, we ask?

**Words** Jamie Dickson

Epiphone's 'Greeny' LP replica may have sharply divided opinion, but it's a really good guitar

Once upon a time, it was obvious where a company's budget brand ended and its prestige brand began. Squier was to Fender what Epiphone was to Gibson – a respectable alternative for those who couldn't afford, or chose not to buy, the full-fat version. If you didn't mind going off-brand entirely, you could buy decent copies by the likes of Tokai.

Today, however, things aren't quite so simple. Take the Chinese-built Epiphone Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' 1959 Les Paul Standard, for example. Not only does it possess the classic 'open book' Gibson headstock shape (a thing hitherto denied to Epiphone buyers), but, at £1,499 it costs more than the current entry level Gibson USA Les Paul – the rather skinny and spartan Les Paul Modern Lite, which can be had for £1,449.

## The presence of a famous name probably will influence how much you want a guitar

Gibson loaded the Epiphone with goodies such as the 'proper' headstock shape, Gibson USA 'Greenybucker' pickups, a one-piece neck, CTS Potentiometers, Mallory Capacitors and more besides – leaving you to decide if the combined effect was worth more than having the coveted 'Gibson' logo on the headstock of the Les Paul Modern Lite, which is not a bad guitar per se but lacks frills of any kind. Essentially, the Epiphone represents the high-end of affordable lutherie, while the Gibson represents the low-end of premium guitar-making.

These two frontiers have never really been allowed to overlap so obviously before, so guitar buyers are maybe a trifle unprepared for the mental calculus involved

Charvel is by no means a budget brand, but buyers still face a tough choice between guitars such as its versatile, Mexico-built Pro-Mod Relic San Dimas Style 1 HH...

...and the boutique-grade feel, finesse and quirky uniqueness of the stripped-down Manson Verona Junior. There are no bad options here!

in figuring what they should buy. A look at the comments below *Guitarist*'s video demo of the Epiphone Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' is instructive: "I've been a long time Epi supporter, but the recent price hike (and for this model in particular) has lost me entirely. Gibson need to rethink their strategy for the Epi brand," one viewer fulminated.

Another chimed in, more positively: "I don't understand the complaints about it being Chinese and an Epiphone. People seem to forget that Gibson used to be the cheaper option and Epiphone the more expensive option. So why shouldn't Epiphone strive to get back to making higher-end guitars? Doesn't matter to me, if it's a great guitar it's a great guitar."

There's no right answer, of course – just a soup of strong, subjective feelings with some chunks of rational argument floating around in it.

Lest this sound like an issue unique to Gibson, buyers face similar (but subtler) conundrums when, for example, choosing between a beautifully made but stripped-down guitar such as the Manson Verona Junior (£1,399) and something like the Mexico-built Charvel Pro-Mod Relic San Dimas Style 1 HH (£1,259). The former is made in the flagship British workshop of the highly respected company that Muse star Matt Bellamy has a majority stake in. Reviewing the Manson Verona Junior, our own Dave Burrluck enthused that, "when a guitar plays and sounds as good as this one, it's a little hard to be objective..." Balanced against that, however, is the fact that the Verona Junior has only one (albeit very good) pickup, no tone control and a well-executed but fairly basic open-pore finish.

By contrast, the Charvel – which belongs in broadly the same category of contemporary rock guitars – has a Floyd Rose, an aged nitro finish (though a somewhat rudimentary relic job), Seymour Duncan JB and '59 humbuckers, plus a compound radius fretboard, too. On paper, arguably, the Charvel offers a more comprehensive package for around £140 less. But how do you put a price on the boutique-grade finesse and attention to detail that the Manson embodies?

To help untangle the tricky choice buyers face when making choices such as this, it's important to separate functional benefits from purely subjective stuff. On the functional side are things such as: hardware and component quality, useful features, and build quality. On the subjective side are things such as: brand cachet, heritage, and artist associations. There's probably a third category that's a bit of both, such as: resale value, exclusivity and collectibility, and country of origin.

There are more factors in play than these, but you get the idea. So how do you weigh all this up if you're shopping in the tricky price band where cheaper high-end electrics compete for your money with the high-end of mainstream brands?

Firstly, it's important to accept that, unless you are unusually pragmatic, the presence of a famous or fashionable name on the headstock probably *will* influence how much you want to own a guitar to some degree. So maybe it's best to acknowledge whatever snobbery lurks within us, rather than pretend we're above such things.

The PRS SE Silver Sky is a good example of a relatively affordable guitar that punches well above its weight in terms of quality and delivers serious daily driver versatility

So if you really can't get past having the 'wrong' brand name in your field of view there's not much point, in the long term, buying a guitar by that maker just because it represents good value for money or is cheap enough to buy today rather than save for.

The good news, if you are of that way of thinking, is that if you buy even a basic guitar by a well-known premium brand it will generally hold its value and sell pretty easily if you later decide to sell it. Also, the tonewoods, hardware and so on are hopefully all of a quality that you'd expect of top brands (though it pays to check).

Weighed against that is the practical experience of playing the guitar in question – do you get goosebumps when you play it? Is it hard to put down once you pick it up? Does it have enough features to serve your musical needs properly? After all, if you play in a function band, you might struggle a bit with a single-pickup guitar with a hot humbucker in it, even if it is by a Very Cool Brand. High-quality, versatile models from affordable product lines, such as PRS's SE Silver Sky, could represent a better option for longterm satisfaction than a dirt-basic model by a higher-end brand. This writer learned that the hard way when, aged 17, he went to Denmark Street and bought a Ferrari Red single-pickup Gibson USA Melody Maker because, well, it just had to be a Gibson and that was the only one he could afford. Though a decent enough guitar, its lack of features was rather limiting and it was soon sold on for a standard Mexico-built Strat that was used for many enjoyable gigs and that is still remembered fondly today. So brand cachet alone isn't enough to make a 'keeper'. And, after all, no-one is handing out medals for owning a guitar by a prestige maker.

> The reality is that the best guitar is one you feel an immediate connection with

The reality is that, as we have often said before, the best guitar to buy is one you feel an immediate connection with – and that isn't always the guitar you thought you were looking for. This writer snobbishly dismissed 70s Gretsches before picking up a well-used Country Club that almost seemed to play itself and sounded sensational. If it had been for sale, I'd have bitten the owner's arm off. So perhaps, in the final analysis, it's best to permit yourself to be persuaded by the guitar itself, and let the chips fall where they may. G

Established 1840

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# True Inspiration

Following on from the excellent 'Inspired By Gibson Custom Shop' electrics we've seen in these pages recently come three high-spec electro-acoustics from the Epiphone brand. How do they measure up?

**Words** David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker

# **EPIPHONE** 1942 BANNER J-45, 1957 SJ-200 & J-180 LS **£1,199, £1,379 & £1,199**

CONTACT **Epiphone** PHONE **00800 444 27661** WEB **www.epiphone.com**

## What You Need To Know

1. **Can Epiphone really justify the current price hike we're seeing?** That's certainly the subject of many a heated debate. But judging by what we see here, we'd have to say that these acoustics represent excellent value for money.

2. **Are they all solid woods?** Yes, we're seeing this more and more from East and Southeast Asian builds. While 'solid woods' is always regarded as a badge of quality, there are plenty of boutique builders who insist that lamination is far from detrimental to tone.

3. **What's the difference between these and Gibson's own?** In terms of price, it's considerable: Gibson's US-made Banner J-45 costs around four times as much. You do have to factor in that these guitars are built offshore with a slightly lower grade of timber, poly finishes and laurel 'boards and bridges. But unlike the Gibsons, you get pickups here.

Everything from Epiphone's 'Inspired By Gibson Custom' range that has come our way in recent months has raised eyebrows hereabouts and we've been left wondering if Gibson's sibling marque's output is a bit of an own goal for the mighty guitar company. After all, with the type of quality we've seen, we have been left wondering why – with this sort of quality readily on hand at around a quarter of the price of the 'real thing' – anyone would even take a second look at the Gibson equivalents. But that was the impression left by the electric instruments. Many would argue that to pull off the same trick with acoustic guitars, which are traditionally harder to manufacture and require far more hands-on work than an electric, is a whole other ballgame.

Casting an eye down the spec sheets on this trio only served to deepen the mystery further. All solid woods, mother-of-pearl inlays, bone nuts and saddles, one-piece mahogany necks and an LR Baggs pickup thrown in for good measure – what's going on here, exactly? The only things that really differentiate these guitars from their made-in-USA counterparts are the poly finishes, instead of nitrocellulose, and laurel fretboards and bridges, instead of rosewood. And the price here includes a posh hard case, too. Surely these can't stand up to the originals, can they? There's only one way to find out: let's start opening cases...

> The craft that has gone into this trio is truly first class – the playability and tone are jaw-dropping

### 1942 Banner J-45

The 'banner' in the J-45's title refers to the motif on the guitar's headstock, which, on a vintage Gibson, would have read, "Only A Gibson Is Good Enough", but here it reads "Inspired By Gibson Custom". The 1942 part really needs no explanation as it refers to the first year of the guitar's production and thus is said by many to be the Holy Grail year of J-45s. As far as this particular dreadnought is concerned, it is known as Gibson's 'workhorse' and has been found in the hands of a whole roster of top-name artists, historically speaking.

Opening the sumptuous hard case with its blue interior lining we could have

A laurel bridge with a compensated bone nut sits atop the J-45's Sitka spruce soundboard

Open-back tuners with white buttons aid the vintage chic of the J-45

easily been looking at a case queen from yesteryear. The VOS finish (standing for 'Vintage Original Sheen') is very effective in summoning up that dulled-down patina of older instruments, but the lack of any finish checking gives the game away. The old-style headstock shape with 'Epiphone' in the same font that was used for Gibson back in the day is another nice touch, and the presence of that banner mentioned earlier completes the look. Before we even pick up the guitar we can tell we're dealing with a class act.

The construction features of the J-45 follow the traditional path in most respects. According to Epiphone's spec the top is red spruce (usually a nickname for Adirondack), but here we're pretty sure that the grain pattern indicates that the top is Sitka. Nothing wrong with that, of course. It's been thermally aged, too, which is another thing you wouldn't necessarily expect to find at this price point.

Back and sides are mahogany and, whereas you might think there could be some cost-cutting in the grade of timber that has been used here, what we see looks more than serviceable and quite in keeping with the overall vintage vibe of the instrument.

1. Whereas the banner on Gibson's headstock would read "Only A Gibson Is Good Enough", here it reads "Inspired By Gibson Custom"

2. Epiphone has used laurel for the fingerboards on all three of these acoustics, but the rich dark colour could easily pass for Indian rosewood

3. The SJ-200's bridge is the model's famous 'moustache' type, with mother-of-pearl inlays. Check out the fancy pickguard, too!

The neck is one-piece mahogany, too, instead of Epiphone's – and many other companies like it – use of scarf joints and separate heels. It's just the fingerboard that contradicts the accepted J-45 recipe in that, here, and indeed on all three of these acoustics, we find laurel instead of rosewood. If you've seen laurel fingerboards elsewhere you may have determined that it can look a little anaemic when compared with rosewood, but that's simply not the case here. The fingerboard is not as dark as some aged instruments we've laid eyes on, but we've definitely seen paler looking rosewood on guitars before now.

The other body furniture here is a laurel bridge (the nut, saddle and string pins are bone) and open-back tuners with period-correct white buttons. The cherry on top comes in the form of an LR Baggs VTC pickup and preamp combo, with the controls tucked away out of sight in the guitar's soundhole – something the Gibson equivalent currently doesn't include.

## The stage-ready J-45 is good for a whole umbrella of styles – it's brimming with vintage chic

3

## 1957 SJ-200

Gibson's 'Super Jumbo' is probably better known as simply the J-200 and more colloquially as the 'whispering giant'. Here, it's received the Epiphone treatment with all the hallmarks of an original from the late 1950s: the famous moustache bridge, large open-book headstock and lavishly decorated pickguard. A giant it most certainly is, but whether it whispers or roars remains to be seen.

Epiphone's SJ-200 follows a similar pattern to that of the J-45. A thermally aged Sitka spruce top with the very suave-looking VOS poly finish that convinces the eye that this instrument already has some miles on the clock. The back and sides are maple, and Epiphone hasn't held back on quality here, either, as the figuring in the timber is very nicely flamed, particularly on the back. The sunburst has been applied well, visibly tipping its hat toward the late-50s vintage era at the same time.

As before, the fingerboard and bridge are both laurel – perhaps a little paler than on the J-45 but still a viable stand-in for rosewood. The bridge, in particular, is very grand, with two strips of mother-of-pearl and bone bridge pins completing the picture. Real m-o-p is also used for the crown inlays, which is another unexpected touch of class on an instrument in this price range.

The neck carries on with the maple theme, with a walnut centre-strip similar to that which you'd find on a Strat or Tele. And, once again, there's an eye-catching flame to the maple here, too. The wide open-book headstock carries the m-o-p Epiphone logo, and the six Kluson-style Epiphone Deluxe tuners, bone nut and compensated saddle round off the accessories.

Like the J-45, the SJ-200 comes with an LR Baggs VTC, ready to take to the stage.

## J-180 LS

Unlike the other two Epiphones we have here, the J-180 doesn't carry a specific date to fix it at a particular point in time. But Gibson lore tells us that the guitar was first introduced in 1962 as a signature model for The Everly Brothers, who had previously shown a fondness for the J-200. When Gibson offered the brothers their own model they said they wanted something that was fundamentally in the same sonic ballpark but with a slightly smaller body – and in a black finish with star inlays. And that's precisely what we have here, although other, quite surprisingly colourful, finishes are available (see spec list).

### THE RIVALS

If you're looking for Gibson-derived acoustic design alternatives, you might want to explore Epiphone's own 'Inspired By Gibson' range that includes both the J-45 (£749) and J-200 (£969) models. Not quite as highly spec'd as what you see here, perhaps, but worth seeking out nevertheless.

Eastman Guitars includes a J-45 lookalike in its range. We were particularly impressed with the E20SS/v (£1,949), for instance. The pricier Eastman AC630 (£2,599) bears more than a passing resemblance to the J-200, too. Taylor's American Dream AD17e (£1,782) has J-45 vibes aplenty, as does Sigma's SJM-SG45 (£1,039). In fact, Sigma's SGJA-SG200 (£1,295) could easily pass as a J-200.

The J-180 doesn't appear to have received lookalike instruments from other companies in the same way as its brethren here. There are close matches, though, Eastman's AC630 BD (£2,999) being a contender.

4. The flame maple on the back of the SJ-200 is really first class and the matt Vintage Original Sheen poly finish sets it off nicely

Underneath the finish we find the same thermally treated Sitka top that's present on the other two guitars, with mahogany back and sides. Apart from that, construction details tell the same story as before: a one-piece mahogany neck with a dark-ish laurel fingerboard and bridge, Epiphone Deluxe tuners with keystone buttons, and bone for the bridge pins, saddle and nut.

The white binding plays the perfect foil to the none-more-black body, the mother-of-pearl star inlays along the fretboard being the only real sign of any serious bling. Everything else here is very gallant and understated. It's a looker, for sure.

## Feel & Sounds

Starting with the 1942 Banner J-45, Epiphone describes the neck profile here as simply 'V', but it's a very soft V. It's quite satisfyingly chunky, too. It's not been overdone; it just feels like you have a very workmanlike handful. The low-ish action makes playing chords a breeze, but, wait a minute... the tone! It's full and earthy with that characteristic grunty bass end that you associate with a good J-45. The trebles are nice and sweetly rounded, too. There's plenty of punchy dynamics that allow anything from gentle strumming to letting yourself go a bit with some wilder fare, and the Epiphone just quietly caters for it with no fuss at all. And all this for around £1.1k? Astounding.

The LR Baggs VTC brings another dimension to the J-45's performance in that it enhances everything we've already heard acoustically, adding a little more flexibility to the Epiphone's already impressive performance. It's a stage-ready acoustic brimming with vintage chic that's good for a whole umbrella of styles – we couldn't really ask for much more.

5. All of the three guitars here come fitted with LR Baggs' VTC pickups, with the controls tucked away in the soundhole

## It's definitely chordal accompaniment where this 1957 SJ-200 jumbo shines the brightest

The 1957 SJ-200 is another instrument that you find yourself holding at arm's length just to admire before you even strum a chord. The J-200 series has always had killer looks and this is something that Epiphone has faithfully preserved here. The spec reveals that the neck shape is a 'C' and we'd agree, but perhaps add that it's a generous C, as was the fashion on 50s instruments practically across the board.

Despite describing how a guitar sounds in the flesh being desperately hard to put down on paper, we'd say that the sound of this 'whispering giant' comes across as being slightly compressed, as if you were in a top-class studio listening to playback after a sound engineer had worked some magic. Not particularly 'whispering', either, as the sound is full and robust across the tonal spectrum; we'd describe it as polite and well behaved. It's the sort of sound that

**6.** The SJ-200's distinctive crown inlays and faultless fretwork feature on the bound laurel fretboard

**7.** Epiphone Deluxe tuners with off-white keystone buttons sit atop the J-180's headstock

8

9

would record well and sit in a mix like it belonged there all along. It responds well to fingerstyle, but it's definitely chordal accompaniment where this jumbo shines the brightest. And the onboard LR Baggs delivers everything into the electronic realm without breaking a sweat.

As with the other two models here, the J-180 LS's neck feels nice and substantial in the hand and is probably best described as a very full C profile and very user-friendly. It's possible to see why The Everlys requested that the J-200 be reduced a little in girth as the handling of the 180 seems a tad more manageable than its larger cousin. Gibson's original design also managed to fulfil their request to keep that unmistakable 'jumbo' voice. It's nicely fat and rounded and, while it might miss a little oomph in the basses, everything here is nicely in proportion with great note separation and a very musical and toneful sound. Like the SJ-200, the output has a slight compression to it, although maybe less so. There's bags of volume on tap if you want to strum hard, but it responds well to gentle fingerstyle, too.

If treading the boards at a live gig is in your sights, then the LR Baggs VTC will be your indomitable companion on stage as it provides everything you need to get your acoustic message across.

10

## Verdict

Okay, we're convinced. Epiphone has pulled off its conjuring trick once again and made three acoustic guitars that are amazing in practically every respect. The workmanship and craft that has gone into this trio is truly first class, and the playability and – most importantly – the tone are jaw-dropping, and once again we find ourselves offering Epiphone a hearty round of applause for delivering the goods as promised.

**8.** The J-180's black finish, which was something allegedly insisted upon by The Everly Brothers, has been expertly applied and buffed to a mirror-like shine

**9.** Star inlays may not be to everyone's taste, but they are a feature of the J-180 and contrast well with the austere finish

**10.** The Gibson 'open book' headstock shape is becoming a familiar sight on the newer Epiphone guitars

The J-45 won our hearts slightly more than its two stablemates because, well, it's as much a legend in terms of dreadnoughts as its rival, Martin's D-28. But the SJ-200 delivers on looks and tone, too. The big beastie though it is, it may have the presence of a giant, but it also boasts such a finely finessed sound. The J-180 may deter a few

## We find ourselves offering Epiphone a hearty round of applause for delivering the goods

would-be purchasers via those perhaps-too-distinctive star inlays, but, once again, it delivers everything it promises and more.

To sum up, this is obviously the beginning of a new age for the Epiphone brand. With these models, and the electrics we've seen so far, the company is shaking off its 'copy' image and occupying a position more like its historic status as a thriving partner to the Gibson brand. We seriously urge you to check these acoustics out – chances are you'll be as impressed as we are.

### EPIPHONE 1942 BANNER J-45

**PRICE:** £1,199 (inc case)
**ORIGIN:** China
**TYPE:** Dreadnought
**TOP:** Thermally aged red spruce
**BACK/SIDES:** Solid mahogany
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 121mm
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 404mm
**NECK:** Mahogany
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")
**TUNERS:** 3-on-a-plate, open back
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/44mm
**FINGERBOARD:** Laurel
**FRETS:** 19
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Laurel/55mm
**ELECTRICS:** LR Baggs VTC
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.63/3.6
**OPTIONS:** None
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The only other acoustics available in the 'Inspired By Gibson Custom Shop' range are the ones you see here. However, Epiphone also has the 'Inspired By Gibson' standard range that features the J-45 Aged Vintage Sunburst Gloss (£749). See website for more
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No
**FINISH:** Vintage Sunburst VOS (Vintage Original Sheen) polyurethane (as reviewed)

Guitarist GOLD **10/10**

**PROS** Classic design, superb build and tone, not to mention the value for money. Full of vintage mojo, too!

**CONS** There's absolutely nothing here to dislike

### EPIPHONE 1957 SJ-200

**PRICE:** £1,379 (inc case)
**ORIGIN:** China
**TYPE:** Jumbo
**TOP:** Thermally aged Sitka spruce
**BACK/SIDES:** Figured maple
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 120mm
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 427mm
**NECK:** Flame maple/walnut
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")
**TUNERS:** Epiphone Deluxe
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/44mm
**FINGERBOARD:** Laurel
**FRETS:** 20
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Laurel/55mm
**ELECTRICS:** LR Baggs VTC
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.4/5.4
**OPTIONS:** See left
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The 'Inspired By Gibson' range includes the J-200 Aged Antique Natural Gloss (£969), J-200 EC Studio Parlor Vintage Natural (£529) and J-200 EC Studio Vintage Natural (£529)
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No
**FINISH:** Vintage Sunburst VOS polyurethane (as reviewed), Antique Natural

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

**PROS** Another superb build of a historic model – big, bold but magically refined sound

**CONS** It's nitpicking, but it is a big-bodied guitar that won't suit everyone

### EPIPHONE J-180 LS

**PRICE:** £1,199 (inc case)
**ORIGIN:** China
**TYPE:** Jumbo
**TOP:** Thermally aged solid spruce
**BACK/SIDES:** Mahogany
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 123mm
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 404mm
**NECK:** Mahogany
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")
**TUNERS:** Epiphone Deluxe/keystone buttons
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/44mm
**FINGERBOARD:** Laurel
**FRETS:** 20
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Laurel/55mm
**ELECTRICS:** LR Baggs VTC
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.2/5
**OPTIONS:** See left
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The J-180 hasn't yet received an 'Inspired By Gibson' model, but it's still possible to track down the Modern Collection J-180 LS (around £1,119) that doesn't appear in the current catalogue. If you're willing to stretch the budget, there's always Gibson's Everly Brothers J-180 - Ebony (£4,799) or the even further up-market Cat Stevens J-180 Collector's Edition Ebony (£7,739)
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No
**FINISH:** Gloss black Ebony poly (as reviewed), Pink, Frost Blue, Kerry Green and Lavender

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

**PROS** An interesting and unusual model with a voice that is probably going to *Wake Up Little Susie*

**CONS** Those star inlays won't be everyone's cup of tea

# In The Loop

Probably the most high-profile exponent of live looping lends his know-how and name to this compact looper

**Words** Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

# SHEERAN LOOPER+ £299

CONTACT **Sheeran Loopers** WEB **www.sheeranloopers.com**

## What You Need To Know

1. **Sheeran? I've heard that name somewhere before...**
We dare say you have! Ed Sheeran has got together with HeadRush to create a couple of loopers to his own specifications and under his name.

2. **Did you say a couple?**
Yes, the flagship Sheeran Looper X with all the bells and whistles, plus this compact + model, which gives you the essentials at a much more affordable price point.

3. **I can't see myself taking one of these on stage...**
Live looping isn't for everyone, but this is a fine resource for general creativity and home practice, too.

There can be few people who've done more to raise the profile of live looping than Ed Sheeran. For years the stadium-playing troubadour has been doing live shows with just him, his guitar, microphones and a looper, building up layers of backing for his songs entirely on the fly. Who better, then, to have his own brand of looper? Ed had previously relied upon Boss loopers, graduating to a custom-built rig, but he has now co-designed two machines that are perfect for his workflow. The Sheeran Looper X (£1,199) is a large beast that has four tracks and eight footswitches with a whole range of functions assigned to them, but we're looking at the twin-footswitch Sheeran Looper+, a lot less complex and certainly more affordable, although its basic functioning follows along the same lines.

The Sheeran Looper+ is an extremely robust pedal with two die-cast aluminium pedal pads as footswitches, an intuitive 1.8-inch colour screen and a large navigation wheel for data entry that's surrounded by an RGB LED loop status ring that lights up red when recording, amber for overdubbing and green for playback. There's stereo or mono input into the looper, so you can plug a single guitar in or perhaps take a feed from any stereo effects or an amp simulator. There's also provision to plug in a dynamic microphone. Output can be mono or stereo.

## In Use

The looper has four different modes that define how you use it. The first and easiest is Single mode where you just use one looping track and build up limitless layers of your performance; the other three modes each utilise two tracks. Multi mode features two tracks with the same loop length, while Sync offers two tracks that can be different lengths but automatically stay in sync with each other. With Sync mode, the second track has to have a length that is a multiple

1. A press on the 360-degree navigation wheel brings up the menu screen and you can use it to scroll through the available menu options or adjust parameter values. A second press confirms your selection

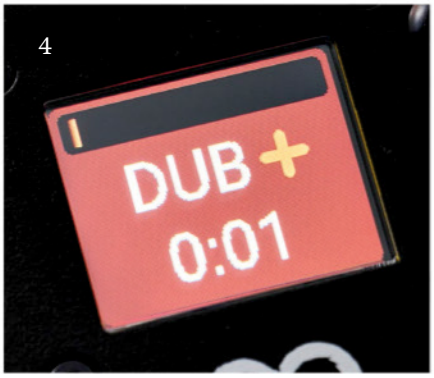
2. The Looper+ is powered by four supplied AA batteries, which offer over six hours of playing life, ideal for on-the-go scenarios. Alternatively, you can go for a nine-volt DC adaptor, which is an optional extra

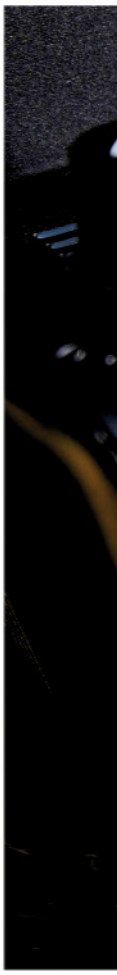
## THE RIVALS

There are plenty of options in the Boss Loop Station range, but the RC-10R Rhythm Loop Station (£259) may be the closest fit. Boss says that it is designed to combine "song-based looping and organic rhythms in a compact package". It features two tracks and onboard rhythms to cover most music genres.

TC Electronic says its four-footswitch Ditto X4 (£205) is "the guitar player's looper". It features two loops and seven loop effects that can be applied.

The Pigtronix Infinity 3 (£349) features two stereo loop pairs that can be played in series or parallel as well as synchronised and cued for automatic playback.



3. This looper has the same premium die-cast aluminium pedals as those on Ed Sheeran's stadium stage looper. They are, says the brand, "precision-engineered with optimal dimensions and spring pressure to be consistently easy to operate"

or division of the first – half as long, twice as long, four times as long and so on. Song mode's two tracks can have the same or different lengths, but, unlike in the other modes, cannot be played together. The idea is that they can function as independent song sections (verse, chorus...), so one track stops playback as the other starts when you switch between them.

Of the two footswitches, the left-hand one is for recording and playback and is set up by default with subsequent presses to Record, then Overdub, then Play – which is the way that Ed likes to work. If that's not your preferred way of doing things, you can dive into the unit's menu and change it to Record, then Play, then Overdub, and you can even do so on the fly if you assign the navigation wheel to that specific function. That left footswitch is also used to undo/redo recorded loops, while the right one is used to stop recording or can be pressed and held to clear the current loop operation.

Starting out in Single mode, operation is a doddle once you've got used to coordinating your playing and your footswitch action to start and finish your first loop. Many players' bugbear with looping is timing, and it has to be said it does take practice to get to a certain level of precision where your loops are perfectly timed so that the end point segues seamlessly into the start point as the audio cycles round. Once you get the hang of it, though, and have hit the footswitch that second time to end your loop and enter overdub mode, the loop will just cycle round and let you keep on overdubbing until you hit the footswitch again, starting playback so you can play over it live without recording – until you want to overdub again.

The other modes are slightly more complex to operate than Single mode as you have to use quick double-presses on the footswitches to switch between tracks. Nevertheless, there's plenty of creativity

4. The multi-coloured LCD display shows information that's relevant to the looper's current operation, including record/overdub/playback status and menu functions

5. On the rear panel the USB socket lets you transfer loops when connected to a computer. You can also use the Looper+ as a 3-in/2-out USB audio interface. An included five-pin adaptor allows you to use the 1/8-inch MIDI input for external MIDI sync and feature control

The combo socket on the far left lets you connect a dynamic microphone, either via XLR or a standard jack. There's no phantom power, though, so you can't use a condenser microphone

## The Looper+ is a practical songwriting resource for slotting parts together… and a great practice tool

waiting to be unleashed in each of them due to the extra possibilities that having two different tracks opens up.

Besides the standard recording and playback functions, there are several treatments for your loops that can be accessed from the menu – fade in or fade out, reverse, half speed, solo and mute. Extra footswitches will give you the option of using some of those live, and you can connect a dual-function footswitch to the provided socket. Also, as alluded to earlier, you can assign a function to a push on the navigation wheel, stepping on it like an extra footswitch when needed. You can save loops to the looper's internal storage, too: there are 128 slots available and up to three hours of storage in total. Stored loops can be easily recalled to be used again.

You can also load other loops, perhaps rhythm tracks, into the unit via the USB connection, importing and exporting wav files between the Looper+ and your computer; the looper will appear as a removable storage device on your desktop. For MIDI users, the unit can be sync'd to incoming MIDI Clock, and its basic functions can also be remotely controlled by incoming MIDI note or program messages sent by external MIDI gear or from your computer.

### Verdict

If you want to do a live-looping, Sheeran-style performance, this unit will facilitate the whole shebang with ease, on stage and beyond. It is, in fact, a dream tool for any busker because it's completely portable if you choose to use it with batteries. It's probably fair to say, though, that the proportion of guitar players who'd wish to do onstage live looping is quite small compared with the number of players who would benefit from owning one – it's a great practice tool and a practical songwriting resource for slotting parts together. You can use it to practise soloing over any chord sequence you choose to play into it. Or you can load it with drum loops or even fully produced backing tracks and use it as your 'band' to play live guitar over the top. The choice is yours.

## SHEERAN LOOPER+

**PRICE:** £299
**ORIGIN:** Philippines
**TYPE:** Looper pedal
**FEATURES:** 4x looper modes, 2x looper tracks, 1.5 hours' max loop length, 30 mins' max overdub time per loop, unlimited layers per loop, storage for 128 loops, 3 hours storage time, MIDI clock sync, over 6 hours' use from a set of batteries
**CONTROLS:** Navigation wheel, instrument input gain, mic input gain, volume, 2x footswitches
**CONNECTIONS:** Combo (XLR and standard) input, 2x standard inputs, 2x standard outputs, MIDI, USB, standard single or dual footswitch input
**POWER:** 4x AA alkaline batteries (supplied) or 9V DC adaptor 500mA (not supplied)
**DIMENSIONS:** 216 (w) x 158 (d) x 76mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

**9/10**

**PROS** Robust; compact size; easy to operate; intuitive, informative display; mono or stereo operation; audio interface capability

**CONS** No phantom power for condenser mics

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« BLUEPRINT »

# BASIC INSTINCTS

The sophisticated range of Swedish-designed guitars made by .strandberg* has lured thousands of players over to the headless side. But the company's new stripped-back Boden Essential model is its strongest play yet for the hearts and minds of mainstream players

**Words** Jamie Dickson **Photography** Phil Barker

Headless guitars have risen phoenix-like from the ashes in recent years. They came to prominence in the 1980s when the heavy through-neck slabs of cocobolo and brass that characterised guitar design in the late 70s fell from favour, and the whiff of patchouli oil that lingered around rock music went with them. The age of the synth had begun and, suddenly, rockstars were more likely to wear Armani suits than kaftans. Headless instruments by companies such as Steinberg, Yamaha and Warwick seemed to fit this clean-lined new aesthetic perfectly. They became so much a part of the look of that era that it's easy to forget that pure functionality underpinned those headless designs – such as the use of then-novel materials such as graphite to make necks ultra-stable, while the loss of the headstock and minimalist bodies made lightweight handling effortless.

The stronger a look, however, the more tied it is to the era that gave birth to it. Headless guitars had a long stint away from the limelight after the 80s and it's only now, some 40 years on, that they seem to be having something of a resurgence – and a lot of that may be down to the efforts of Ola Strandberg, the founder of Swedish guitar maker .strandberg*, to make players look afresh at them. Scandinavian design is famously good at uniting form and function in an elegant, modernist way. This is certainly true of Ola's guitars, which make few concessions to tradition in their quest for the ultimate in ergonomic playing performance – though they do make some, which is probably key to the maker's success.

Ola Strandberg's ruling passion is to design guitars that offer greater comfort, ergonomics and ease of playing

PHOTO COURTESY OF .STRANDBERG*

Unlike the 'cricket bat' styling of most 80s-era headless guitars, .strandberg* guitars have compact but relatively familiar body styling, somewhat resembling a Strat outline in the case of the Boden model and its variants, which are offered with eye-pleasing figured tops. But there tradition ends and evolution begins. One of Ola's goals has always been to improve the ergonomics of the electric guitar – losing the headstock means the guitar is more compact and less cumbersome when, for example, seated in a home recording studio, laying down tracks and then editing as you go.

Yet more unconventional is the EndurNeck neck design, which utilises a unique profile that, in cross-section, resembles half a hexagon, though with softly rounded corners. Ola says the advantages of this unconventional profile include reduced hand fatigue, better hand positioning and greater playing comfort, while permitting the player to grip the neck with greater strength if needed. The flat planes of the EndurNeck design also twist like a helix subtly along the length of the neck, encouraging ideal hand positioning at any given point and, let it be said, this feels far more comfortable and natural in use than it sounds.

Balking convention even further, the EndurNeck is typically paired with fan frets – which .strandberg* calls 'multi-scale' fretting. The idea behind fan frets is that the low strings get the scale length they perform best at – with enough tension to ensure note clarity and cohesion – while the high, unwound strings remain supple and easy to bend. In other words, the best performance attributes of both longer- and shorter-scale guitars but on the same instrument. Like the EndurNeck system, while they may look unconventional, the multi-scale fretting used on much of the .strandberg* range to date feels surprisingly 'normal' to play, requiring little or no adaptation of your playing style while granting the above benefits.

But as with all design features, there is a trade-off. The multi-scale feature is

"We wanted the Boden Essential to be more accessible, to not [scare people] with another innovative feature"

The new Boden Essential retains many of the features that have made .strandberg* guitars popular but has standard frets and a conventional nut

1. The Boden Essential uses the same excellent pickups as its more expensive kin

2. The new Boden Essential uses a standard nut to reduce maintenance and offer a more conventional drive

3. Attractive solid-colour finishes and a revised bridge design made of cast zinc are also part of this affordable but compelling package

expensive to make, and, for some players, is just a little too oddball. With this in mind, .strandberg* released the Boden Essential, the company's first sub-£1,000 electric, at the 2024 Winter NAMM Show, featuring standard frets and new hardware. Intrigued, we join Ola to discover if this really is the Goldilocks-style 'just right' solution for players interested in .strandberg* guitars but looking for an affordable, familiar entry into the brand.

**What are the main differences between Boden Essential and the other models that have borne the Boden name prior to now?**
"There are two obvious things. One is the price point – it's not necessarily what we want to lead with when we are telling people about Boden Essential, but obviously it is a very important aspect of it. We've chosen instead to base our campaign on the credo: 'Play more.' It suggests playfulness but also the act of playing more. With .strandberg* guitars in general, the ergonomic features facilitate playing more and playing injury-free and so on. But [the 'Play More' idea with Boden Essential is also] to put it within reach of more people.

"The next thing that stands out just looking at the instrument, it's obvious it has a straight scale, rather than a multi-scale. Part of that is to lower the barrier of entry to a more traditional player who would be put off by the multi-scale. I think .strandberg* in general, or the Boden design, has balanced the innovative features and a nod to tradition in a way that when people walk through on a trade show they see it out of the corner of their eye and it's different enough to be interesting – but it's not so different that you just keep walking. It doesn't scare you off. You stop, you pick it up and then you get the sensation, 'It's so light, what's going on with this neck shape?' It kind of invites playing.

> "The pickups are the same that we used in our Standard line. They're voiced in a modern but still traditional way"

"But I do know the multi-scale still scares some people away. We also wanted it to be more accessible to people from that perspective, to not be scared off by another innovative feature. Strictly speaking, the six-string guitar has always been a straight scale, so we can't really say that's not the way to do it. But, in fact, our [version of] multi-scale is already very subtle, it's not contributing *that* much to the conversation. So it is a feature we can sacrifice, so to speak, but still feel okay about it. It is one of the more costly features to install on our guitars, so that also contributes in a big way to lowering the price point."

**The conventional fretting is one of the more visible changes on Boden Essential, but how about subtler tweaks to the design?**
"Well, we also moved away from [using] a zero fret on this guitar. We've always had something that looks like a nut but is, in fact, just a string guide – it just places the strings in a sideways orientation, after which they would then run over a zero fret. I guess one of the most frequent complaints or questions people have about that design feature concerns wear on that zero fret, which can cause a pingy noise when you do bends. For many, it's not an issue and [as a design choice] it's a trade-off. For example, I like the fact that when the string rests on a zero fret, you get the same tone and attack as all of the other frets when you play. The price you pay is sometimes having to polish out dents in that zero fret.

"So in making the instrument more accessible to a larger audience, we introduced a conventional nut. It's actually the same nut [modified to be fully functional] that's usually our string guide. The string will rest on the nut instead of the zero fret to put it closer to where people are used to, but it also removes one item of periodic maintenance they would otherwise have to go through. That's a feature that's probably a bigger change than most other things, since I've always used a zero fret.

"Actually, the original reason for [us using] the zero fret was that the bridge has always been made from anodised

"We tried to influence all our decision-making on sustainability, and that also impacted the choice of body wood"

3

aluminium, which doesn't conduct electricity. So what I would do from day one is I would ground the string – just one string – at the bridge end. Then the zero fret would connect the other strings electronically to that point to ground. But the Boden Essential features new-generation [bridge] hardware that we call EGS Arc that is plated and not anodised. It's made from cast zinc, rather than machined aluminium like on the other bridges. For the first time, we'll have an electrically conductive bridge – so that was the other reason we could sacrifice the zero fret.

"Another feature [of the new hardware is that] the saddles are oversized compared with what they would need to be to function. That's because they're part of the sound of the instrument and we can play with this saddle design a lot; we can change the saddle material and it can influence what the instrument does and how it sounds. By doing that, we can offer upgrades for customers. So it's not just a means of cost reduction, it's actually a means of introducing new features. By altering the saddle material or the exclusivity factor of the saddles, we can use it in the future for other guitars that are not the Essential."

**How about the tonewoods used?**

"We tried to influence all our decision-making on sustainability and whatever is better for the planet, and that also impacted the choice of body wood. We specifically chose a wood, meranti, that grows natively to Indonesia [where the guitars are made]. We did have several candidates and we picked this because it does what we need it to – it's mahogany-ish, but it's also grown locally in Indonesia so we can reduce the amount of shipping needed.

"The other thing is that, previously, for several years we moved away from roasted maple in our guitars because the brittleness

**4.** Ola's commitment to enhanced ergonomics is clear when looking at the reverse of the Boden Essential, which features deep comfort contours and a rounded, sculpted heel to the neck

[of that material] would cause a lot of tear-out in production, so there was too much [wastage] in the manufacturing. But now we've actually changed our processes and machines – we're in a newer facility at PT Cort with better machines. The precision of those machines allows us to get back to using roasted maple without this increased fallout in production. That, I think, is another thing that people will appreciate. Many of our customers and potential .strandberg* customers have been sad about us moving away from roasted maple, so it's now making its way back. I think those are probably the big things for the Essential."

**You set out to make this guitar more accessible to a wider range of people. Did you change the voicing of the pickups to suit a more traditional customer or stick with the tried-and-trusted originals?**
"The pickups that we ended up using are the same ones that we used historically in what we call our Standard line, which are kind of hot-rodded to begin with.

> "We can change the saddle material and it can influence what the instrument does and how it sounds"

They're voiced in a modern but still traditional way, so they were actually a pretty good fit. I guess we originally envisioned cutting more cost on the pickup side, but ended up not wanting to sacrifice anything there. It would have been such a small [cost saving] anyway and people enjoy them.

"Sticking to these pickups was easy because voicing pickups is a lot of work, actually. Not just work-work, but it's a lot of elapsed time because it's such a complex process. Whenever we want to change something, I have to wait for them to be wound. We don't wind pickups in-house, so it means shipping and installing them into a guitar and trying them out. We have done that in the past and it's a pretty extensive project to do it well. It was pretty easy to just stick with what we had.

"I think one of the things where I have perhaps succeeded as a designer is historically I've been able to quit designing at some point and say, 'It's good enough.' We actually get it out there."

**How have people reacted to the new Boden Essential so far?**
"I think most people have reacted very positively, for sure. Most of the reactions that I've heard have been one of just surprise that we could cram so much into that price point. The conversations that I was part of, people didn't really reflect over any loss of features, loss of brand values or anything. It's more one of, 'How could you make a .strandberg* this affordable?' It is truly a .strandberg* instrument. I hope you'll get an opportunity to play one – it resonates and vibrates like a .strandberg* guitar should. I don't think anyone will be disappointed when they try it." **https://strandbergguitars.com**

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# JENNIFER BATTEN

Former Jeff Beck gun-for-hire takes us through her new-found love of Suhr guitars and why she's only "semi-sad" about letting her road-tested Washburn go

Jennifer used a Washburn as a stage guitar for almost two decades, but recently found a better fit for her playing...

PHOTO BY OLLY CURTIS

***What was the first serious guitar you bought with your own money?***

"That was a Sunburst Les Paul. I got a loan from my dad and paid it back for many years. I believe the inspiration was photos of Duane Allman."

***What was the last guitar you bought and why?***

"The last guitar I bought was a Suhr Modern Antique. I need a great bridge/middle combo for a lot of the shows I'm playing now, but I was always compromising with my Washburn Parallaxe 24-fret. I thought I couldn't get the sound I wanted because it was a 24-fret neck, and you couldn't get proper Strat spacing.

"Then I was sharing the stage with the phenomenal Brazilian guitarist Leandre Gomes; he had me play his Suhr Modern Antique 24-fret guitar into my system, and the clouds parted. I soon bought my own and have never played a more comfortable neck.

"I was timid for quite a while because I'd played with a Floyd [Rose] since the 80s, but I now find I can do some pretty extreme vibrato with the bar using the Wilkinson locking bridge WVS130. But there is no locking nut; it just stays in tune. I also use Big Bends Nut Sauce on the bridge and nut."

> "My current main Suhr is a relic and looks like it was dragged behind a school bus on lava rock, and that's just fine by me"

***What is the most incredible find or bargain you've had when buying gear?***

"Suhrs are hella expensive, often running $3,500 to $5,000 – but I found mine on Reverb from Japan for just $2,600!"

***What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever experienced?***

"I've been using the Midi Commander [footswitch] for years to change presets. [I then decided to try the] Midi Captain, which looked very promising since I now need to change snapshots versus presets. I bought one and it toasted while updating. I returned it to Amazon and got another. Same thing. No response from the company for help. I gave up on them and missed my return window and am now very happy with Morningstar MC8. Their support team is great, and the programming interface is really good."

## JENNIFER'S GO-TO RIG

**"My rig these days consists of a BluGuitar Amp1 and BluGuitar FatCab, a Line 6 HX Stomp XL, and a Morningstar MC8 Midi Controller. I also use a Suhr Modern Antique guitar with an added Wilkinson locking bridge [WVS130] and Lock-It Straps. I also have a D'Addario XPND pedalboard and case, ASI Audio 3D Ambient in-ear monitors and RockBoard cables. As for pedals, I use a Boss FV-50L Volume Pedal and Line 6 EX-1 Expression Pedals – one for wah whammy and other specialty and the other for delay mix. "I've just added (for the HX Stomp and MC8) the Mission Engineering 529M Ultra-compact, High-Efficiency USB C-PD Converter for Effects Pedals, and Specialized cables 2.1mm to 2.5mm DC Cable for Line 6 HX (and other pedals) by SweetFoot pedals, which are impossible to find anywhere else. Most just have adaptors."**

***Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go of?***

"I'm only semi-sad that I sold the Washburn I used on the [Michael Jackson] HIStory Tour and Jeff Beck tours – just because of the years of mojo and the historical angle. My new Suhr kicks its ass, but it had a lot going for it, including comfort and weight. It's now in a museum in China.

"I'm also semi-sad that I sold my King Tut Ibanez, painted by Pamelina Hovnatanian. She did an incredible job using gold leaf in Tut's portrait across the whole body. But the guitar just sounded harsh, so it now resides in the Hard Rock [Cafe] in Myrtle Beach [South Carolina], which is a pyramid-shaped building. It's a beautiful display in a glass case and a very appropriate home. Given the amount of effort that went into the artwork, I kind of gave up on such customisations because you don't really know a guitar until you've spent many hours with it. The art typically comes well before you've had that chance to even know if you like it or not, so it's wasteful if it doesn't work out.

"My current main Suhr is a relic and looks like it was dragged behind a school bus on lava rock, and that's just fine by me. I sold one of the small Ibanez George Benson guitars years ago, and kind of wish I still had that. I don't even know if you can get them any more. It would be a nice couch guitar because it's a hollow body and much smaller than the average archtop."

***What's your best guitar-buying tip?***

"If you can spend some time with a guitar, it's the best option. But with the Suhr, I went on having played someone else's [first]. I don't see them in local shops. The company's reputation is well warranted, and they have a great support team. You can go on their site and detail every aspect of a custom guitar if you're so inclined."

***When was the last time you stopped and looked in a guitar shop or browsed online, and what were you looking at?***

"I find myself in guitar shops frequently on my travels and, of course, for guitar clinics, but I rarely play anything on the wall. I admire the finishes while they're hanging up, but, honestly, I prefer secondhand instruments that have already had the break-in period and the necks are stable. My comfort zone is plugging into my own system and being alone."

***If forced to make a choice, would you rather have a really good guitar and cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?***

"Personally, I would rather have a good guitar and a cheap amp. I see it as your hands are number one, the instrument is number two, and what you play through is number three."

***If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would you choose?***

"With humbuckers or single coils, I now can definitely say I'd go with single coils. Simply because of the Fishman Fluence line making them low noise." **[AD]**

Head to Jennifer's website for her full performance schedule and info on guitar lessons and courses

**www.jenniferbatten.com**

Jennifer discovered Suhr guitars when she heard Brazilian guitarist Leandre Gomes (with whom she works alongside in a Michael Jackson tribute show) playing one. "The clouds parted," she says. "I soon bought my own and have never played a more comfortable neck"

The MOD SQUAD

# PARALLEL LINES

No, we're not investigating the guitar sounds from the classic Blondie album, says Dave Burrluck, instead we're shining a light on a largely overlooked way of wiring a humbucker

Back in the good ol' days of the late 70s and early 80s, us keen modders were beginning to get the aftermarket parts our guitar-fantasies needed, not least pickups. Up to that point, unless you wanted to modify a humbucker yourself, you were stuck with one sound: you'd wire the 'hot' output to your volume pot or switch, and wire the earth to the back of a pot. All good.

I don't think Larry DiMarzio was the first person to offer up a different route, but in terms of *my* experience he certainly was, with the four-conductor hook-up cable. As each of the humbucker's two coils has a start and finish wire (two coils, four conductors) it meant that, usefully, you could wire a humbucker's two coils in different ways: standard series, voice either single coil by dumping the unwanted coil to ground, or wire the two coils in parallel, retaining the hum-cancelling nature (unlike the single coil option) but giving a slightly lower-output, more single-coil-type of sound. Armed with a mini-toggle switch or two, we now had access to more sounds from the same pickup. And, certainly back then, more was best!

But fast-forward to today and the vast majority of humbucking guitars might have a cursory coil-split, but it's actually quite rare to find a parallel option on a production guitar. One exception is Mark Lettieri's HSS PRS Fiore [pic 1] where the bridge humbucker has its own series/parallel switch. Another more recent example is on Manson's rather good Verona Junior [pic 2], which uses a single volume control with a pull-switch to reconfigure the humbucker to parallel. Now, that isn't rocket science, but it gives two very usable voices, both of which buck the hum, and the ears at Manson simply preferred the parallel option to the more usual single coil-split.

> "Going parallel can be a gig-saver where you might need a single-coil-type sound on a song"

Testing that Manson guitar last issue was quite a revelation, or at least a reminder of the potential. With the switch down in series mode and a gain-y amp voice, the Manson Dirty Rascal pickup sounded huge; pull up the switch to parallel mode and it's almost like a two-channel amp's dirty-to-cleaner sound. Or if you set up your main rhythm sound in the parallel mode, the switch to series is a very effective thicker solo boost.

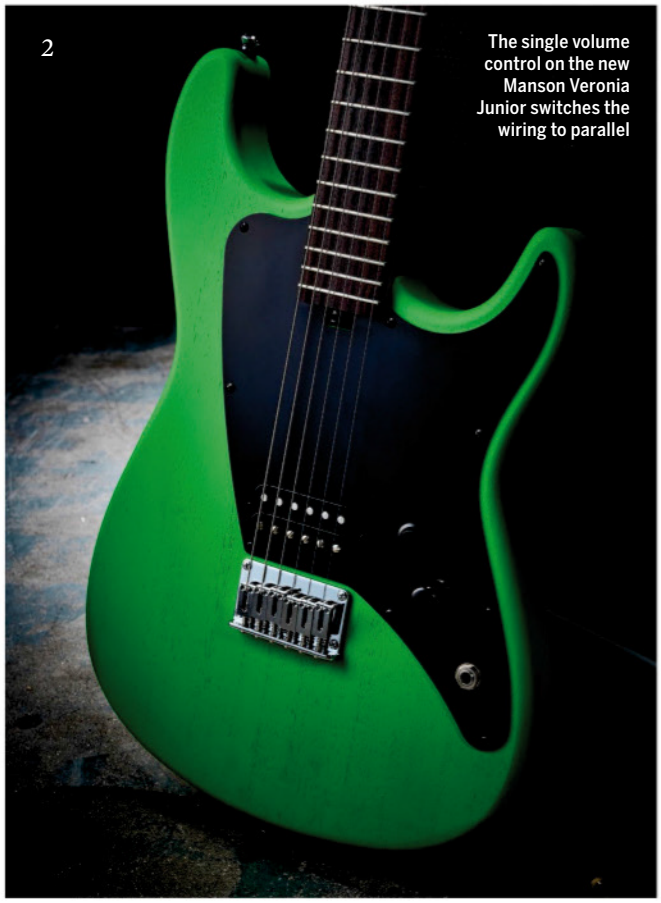
For any gigging guitarist, going parallel can be a gig-saver where you might need a single-coil-type sound on a song, but the proximity of lighting rigs and so on can turn your humuckers' single-coil-splits into very efficient hum receptors.

Pickup style plays a part, too. You might have a guitar with, let's say, a Seymour Duncan JB or a good ol' DiMarzio Super Distortion and find that your sound is simply too big and thick. But wiring the

PHOTO OPPOSITE BY DAVE BURRLUCK

Mark Lettieri's PRS Fiore is one of the few humbucking guitars with a series/parallel switch

1

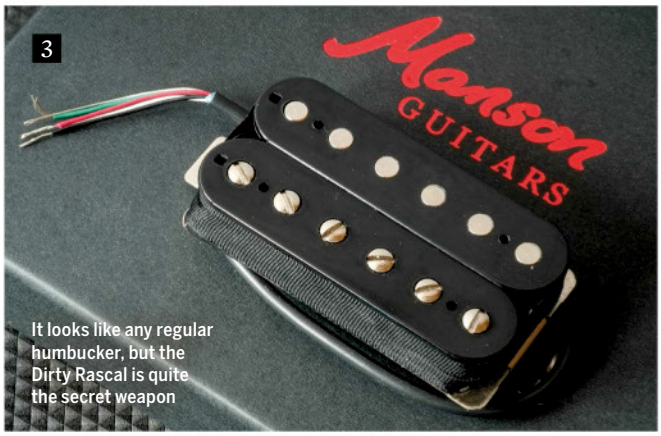


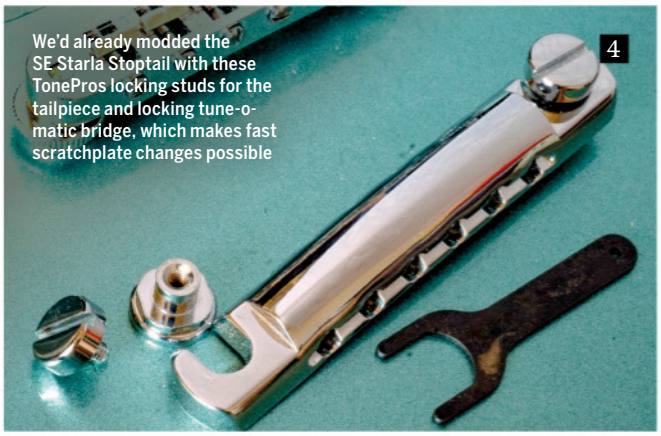
2

The single volume control on the new Manson Veronia Junior switches the wiring to parallel

PHOTOS BY NEIL GODWIN & OLLY CURTIS

This SE Starla Stoptail, in Frost Green Metallic, is no longer in the PRS line-up. Shame. It's a lightweight 'alternative' design much loved by the PRS community – and The Mod Squad!

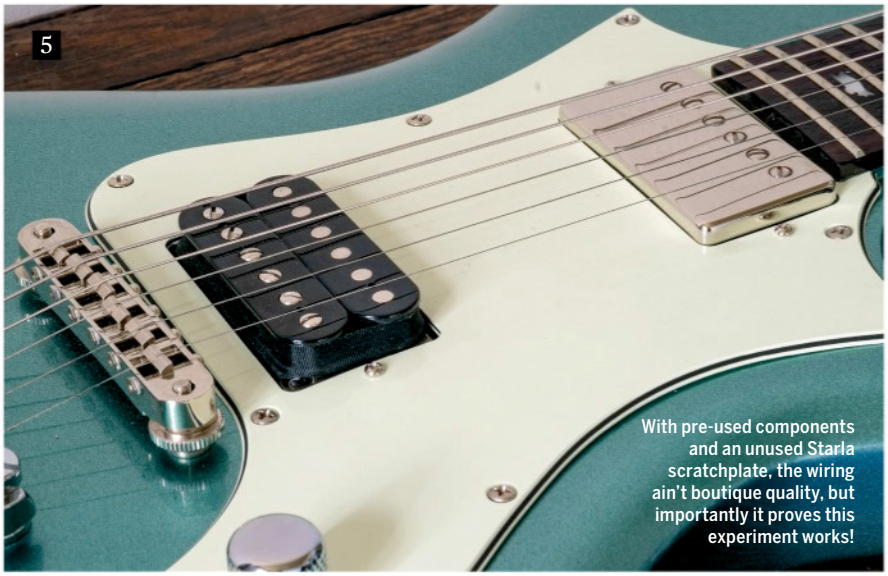


pickup in parallel, not series, will pull back the heat and give you more clarity. Another use would be to cure a thick, mushy neck humbucker: change the wiring from series to parallel and you might well save yourself the cost of a new pickup.

## The Backstory

When two coils are wired in series they are additive: one 6kohm coil is added to the other giving you a DCR of 12k. But in parallel, rather like the neck and middle, or middle and bridge combinations of a Stratocaster where each pickup (a single coil) is wired at one end to hot and the other to ground and then combined in parallel, you'll notice the DCR drops to around 3k for the same two combined 6k coils. Just the same as when you combine two resistors in either series or parallel.



"Some find the parallel configuration of the humbucker a little bland without the character of a true single coil"

You'll hear this on a Telecaster, too, of course, which again has its two single coils, when combined, wired in parallel. If you've ever tried the four-position selector switch mod, then that extra switch position gives you the two single coils wired in *series* for that bigger additional sound. Exactly the contrast of the parallel and series combinations.

To present the prosecution case, some find the parallel configuration of a humbucker a little bland without the character of a true single coil, which of course it isn't. But then just as many people don't use coil-splits – one coil of a humbucker – even if they're on their guitars because they don't really sound like single coils, more like half a humbucker.

## Into Action

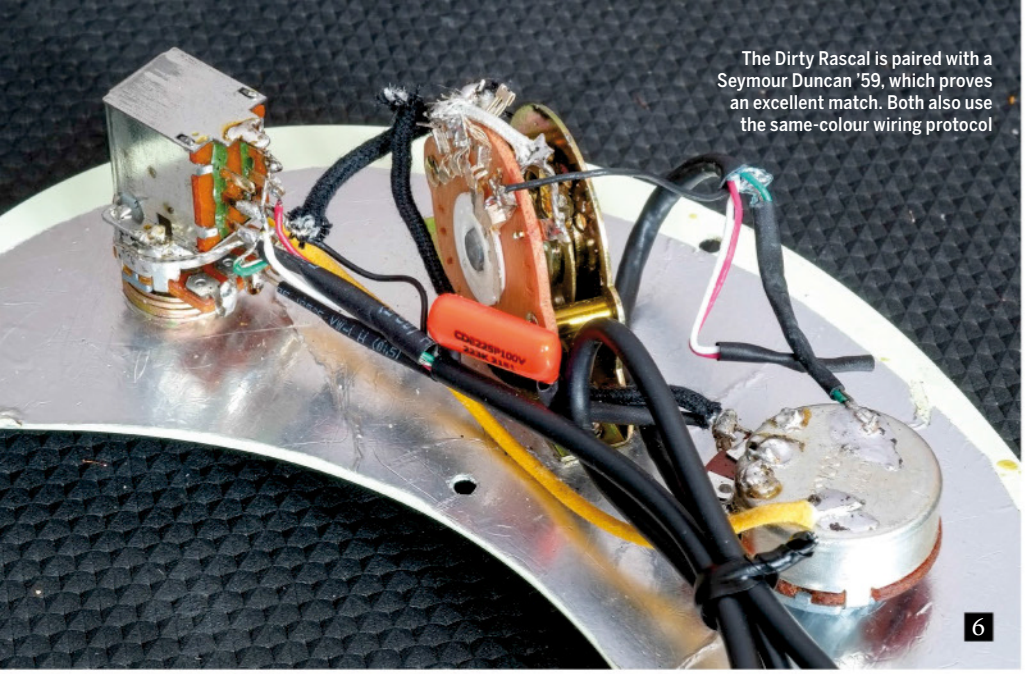
Personally, I've become quite the devotee of single-coil-splits on humbucking guitars, not least PRS-style partial splits (with or without an additional 470/500k resistor that means the single coil sees a 250k pot, rather than the 500k in humbucking mode). But a recent request to dep for a mate's band had me thinking: not only will I need a more gain-y sound than I'd usually use, along with plenty of janglier 'single coil' parts, but we'll be using a backline supplied by the venue (at which I've never played before). And in central London it's a no-car zone: I'll literally hop on the train, take one guitar and a couple of pedals and, well, hope for the best.

The combination of that slightly hotter Manson Dirty Rascal humbucker that I'd recently tested, and the series/parallel 'Mojo' switch, as Manson names it, got me thinking. Entering the unknown in terms of venues, I'm concerned about single-coil hum pick-up. Most of the time that's really not a problem, but I'm going to be wrestling with an unfamiliar setlist, probably a line-check at best, and I really don't want to risk having to wrestle with hum. I need beef and clean/light crunch and belt 'n' braces hum-cancelling! Explaining my impending new-gig dilemma to the Dirty Rascal's designer, Simon Thorn (who also moonlights as tech for Yes and admitted that single-coil hum is the bane of his life), he graciously suggests I try a Dirty Rascal [pic 3].

Manson might not be your first thought when it comes to replacement pickups, but the company has a mini-range all wound at its Devon HQ – including the PF-1 Matt Bellamy Signature, and the Benchmark PAF-alike, priced sensibly from £129 for the uncovered versions. By design, the new, similarly priced Dirty Rascal sits between those two in terms of output and, as we reported in that Junior review, was actually designed with Graham Coxon in mind.

"Originally designed for our 2023 Junior range," says Manson's website, "it is based on the classic PAF design but with an added 'little bit more of everything'. Our vintage wiring, cast Alnico V magnets, US high-carbon steel slugs and screws give this pickup an extra bit of sparkle at the top-end, spikier mids and meatier lows,

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK



The Dirty Rascal is paired with a Seymour Duncan '59, which proves an excellent match. Both also use the same-colour wiring protocol

6

Using a screw-in (not push-on) knob for a pull-push pot is pretty sensible. Trying to remove a tight push-on knob can mean you actually pull out the shaft of the pot

7

## MOD SPEC

**PRODUCT:** Manson Guitar Works Dirty Rascal humbucker with series/parallel mod
**COST:** From £129 (as evaluated), plus pull-push switched pot (£10 to £12)
**TYPE:** Standard humbucking size with sandcast Alnico V magnet, American high-carbon steel slugs and screws
**QUOTED DCR:** 9.5kohms, drops to 2.37k in parallel
**SKILL LEVEL:** If you can solder, it's pretty easy, though wiring mini-switches can be fiddly. You'll need one DPDT switch, or a switched pot, to wire in the series/parallel option

**www.masonguitarworks.com**

**PROS** Very fit-for-purpose slightly hotter PAF that sounds equally good wired in parallel and is still hum-cancelling

**CONS** The pickup can get a little pricey with the covered options, but when it sounds this good...

Guitarist CHOICE

**9/10**

meaning its 9.5k output retains classiness but with some added fight." For once, a bit of marketing blurb couldn't be more accurate: it's exactly my experience with the pickup on that Junior.

### Quick Change

Nicely presented, the Manson pickup doesn't come with any wiring instructions, however. As any pickup tinkerer will know this is pretty important as – most unhelpfully! – different pickup brands use different colour codes for their four conductors. Manson CEO Adrian Ashton confirms that its pickups very sensibly follow the Seymour Duncan protocol, and by heading over to the company's website you'll find the wiring diagram for a series/parallel pull-push switch... and plenty more besides.

I don't want to muck up a perfectly good guitar in the pursuit of research, so instead I pull out the SE Starla I'd turned into a scratchplate-swapping instrument back in issues 457 and 458. Basically, I'd fitted a locking TonePros tune-o-matic and locking studs for the stop tailpiece [pic 4] and PRS SE locking tuners. It means that by simply slackening strings and capo'ing at the 1st fret I can remove the stud tailpiece quickly, unscrew the scratchplate and – thanks to a screw block terminal mounted on the volume pot, supplied by Radioshop Pickups – I can screw in the output jack wires and string ground and change an entire scratchplate without warming up a soldering iron. Although I'm out of those screw-block volume pots using a spare Starla scratchplate (which is still available from PRS Europe), it's not a difficult job, as I'm opting for pre-used parts to install a master volume, three-way lever switch and pull-push switched tone pot for the series/parallel function [pic 5]. I load the new Dirty Rascal at the bridge and a spare Seymour Duncan '59 at the neck [pics 6 & 7].

> "[This experiment works as a] reminder that a humbucker can produce more sounds than we're usually offered"

A little while later and I'm in business with another voice – or voices – compared with the previous PRS 58/15-loaded scratchplate I'd had on the SE Starla for a while. This new pickup combination hits that slightly gainier slot. The Dirty Rascal sounds like a hotter PAF to me, with plenty of character to the pretty classic voice, just with more oomph and sizzle. The Seymour Duncan '59 matches rather better than I had expected – it has a really vocal, expressive voice that would fool a listener into thinking they were hearing a good Les Paul. The Dirty Rascal's parallel voice wouldn't fool anyone that you're playing a classic single coil, but it works very well in this context, not least with a touch of tone control roll-off hinting at Rickenbacker and Gretsch, and it mixes really well with the neck pickup.

Not all experiments work, but this one really does. It's a reminder that a humbucker can easily produce more sounds than we're usually offered, and a confirmation that Manson Guitar Works is making some rather good pickups! G

Huw Price's
# Nitty Gritty

Huw embarks on a project to restore this dream guitar to its former glory

# 1957 Stratocaster Restoration (Part 1)

I never imagined that I would own a 1950s Stratocaster. The closest I'd come was when my guitar-playing school teacher tipped me off about a 50s Strat for sale at Livewire Music in Cardiff. Having looked it over, I decided the scruffy black refinish and generally dirty condition didn't justify the £200 asking price. Clearly, I wasn't cut out for a career in finance, but in my defence, I must point out that this happened in 1983. Back then, you could still find all-original pre-CBS Strats for under four figures and nobody that I knew was doing relic finishes or selling vintage parts.

Fast forward to the early Noughties and my youthful enthusiasm for SRV started gravitating towards his brother Jimmie's subtler playing style as well as his taste in guitars. I'd also had the opportunity to play a handful of '56 and '57 examples and was knocked out by the clean elegance of their styling, sleekly sculpted bodies and sublime soft V neck profiles.

I came to prefer the earlier pickups and maple 'boards, and the way those guitars seemed to possess more than a hint of 50s Telecaster. To scratch the itch, I even built a partscaster '54 replica and it remained my main guitar for over a decade until I received a fateful phone call from a now-defunct guitar shop.

## Once In A Lifetime

At the time I was doing occasional vintage restoration work for the shop and they asked me to appraise a Stratocaster that was part of a large collection they had acquired. Having been assured it was a '57 model, they wanted a second opinion.

Soon after, a non-original case arrived containing a bizarre-looking gold Strat. My first impressions were not good, but the moment I lifted the guitar from its case to gauge the weight and balance, my feelings changed. When I tuned it up and strummed a chord, I knew it was something special – even if I wasn't entirely sure what that was.

I spent the next few hours examining every part in minute detail, wrote my appraisal and emailed it to the shop. In short, I concluded the guitar comprised an October 1956 alder body with a March 1957 neck with mostly vintage parts. I couldn't claim that all the pieces left the Fender factory on the same guitar on the same day, but it was definitely a 90 per cent original pre-CBS Strat.

The shop phoned to thank me for my work and dropped a bombshell by telling me how much they were planning to sell it for. I won't reveal the exact figure, but it was more like a no-brainer than a no-hoper and I felt like I had been transported back to the 1980s. I asked if he had his card machine handy, paid him over the phone and waived my appraisal fee.

## Body Of Evidence

Despite the fact that it played pretty well and sounded fantastic, I was under no illusions that this was a restoration project, and it wouldn't be the first time the guitar had undergone such a process. The clues suggested that the guitar had been professionally refurbished sometime during the 1970s or 80s, according to the methods and sensibilities of the time.

Had the finish been original, I would have been in a quandary because I don't really care for gold Strats. Tests established it wasn't nitrocellulose because it wouldn't rub off onto an acetone-soaked cotton bud.

> "The price was more like a no-brainer than a no-hoper and I felt like I had been transported back to the 1980s"

The 1956 Strat I borrowed from Andrew Raymond at Vintage 'n' Rare (pictured left) helped with authentication of my Strat because it had an identical body date to mine and was labelled with very similar handwriting

PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE

I could also see that the body had lost depth in some areas, and beneath the pickguard there was evidence of a plugged hole in the space beneath the pickups where owners so often added switches.

The router template dowel holes could be seen through the finish and they were exactly where I'd expect to find them. Having restored more than a few vintage Strats, I also knew how far apart they should be and the spacing was perfect. Better still, the body exhibited the same extreme contouring that is typical of the '56/'57 era.

But the clincher was found under the spring claw. Whoever did the respray had the foresight to place masking tape over the body date and the yellow centre of a sunburst finish was plain to see. In a bizarre coincidence, the '56 Strat that I'd borrowed from my friend Andrew Raymond to help with the assessment had exactly the same body date of '10/56'. Both appeared to be written by the same hand using the same thick pencil.

The necks of Andrew Raymond's '56 Strat (left) and mine feel similar, the weights are nearly identical and they sound almost indistinguishable, so the challenge will be to make mine look the same

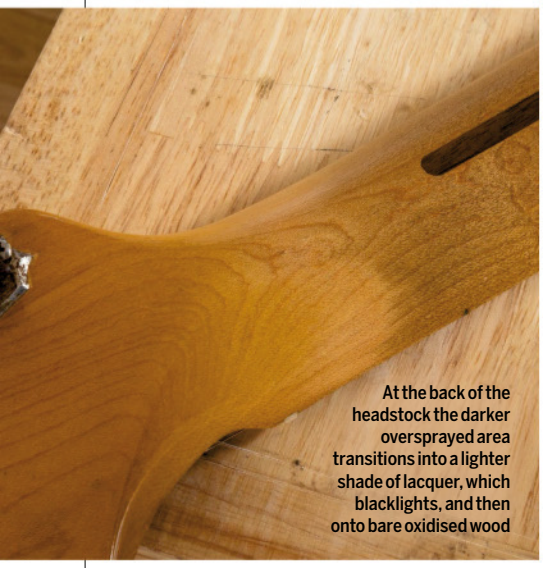
The 3/57 pencil date is consistent with the neck's build features, but the full length threads indicate the fixing screws are 1960s or later

## Neck Pains

My greatest area of concern was the neck because, in comparison to Andrew's, it felt a little lacking in depth. Someone had performed a pretty decent refret, using medium jumbo frets, and the fretboard had been refinished in the process. A clear indication of what happened could be seen at the headstock end, where the top of the walnut truss rod plug could be seen on both sides of the nut.

Wear and patina weren't so highly prized years ago, and many vintage guitar owners were more concerned with having presentable-looking guitars than originality. Clearly, a decision to sand the 'board had been made when the original frets were being replaced and it was most likely done to remove divots and finger marks. Unfortunately, it ended up getting over-sanded, which is why the neck seemed slim and the plug became exposed. But even so, the neck still felt superb, with a soft V gradually transitioning to a more rounded profile higher up.

Under black light, it appeared that only the headstock and heel had been oversprayed when the fretboard was refinished. The back of the neck looked and felt original, which enhanced the vintage feel. Although the decal was oddly positioned, it was actually similar to Andrew's '56 Strat, but the headstock was one of those thinner examples that are sometimes seen around 1957.


At the back of the headstock the darker oversprayed area transitions into a lighter shade of lacquer, which blacklights, and then onto bare oxidised wood

## Plastic Perusal

The pickguard certainly appeared old, with the correct 1/16-inch thickness and edges that looked like they had been stamped out, rather than routed. That body plug cast some doubt on it being original to the guitar, but maybe the owner who had the switches retrofitted also had enough sense to cut switch holes in a pre-placement 'guard. Or it could be an original vintage 'guard that was sourced to replace the punctured pickguard when the body was restored. It's

> "A decision to sand the 'board had been made when the original frets were being replaced"

even conceivable that somebody fabricated a replacement from plastic sheet, but this is likely to remain a mystery.

During 1957, Fender was transitioning from polystyrene knobs, switch tips and pickup covers, to ABS plastic. Both probably started out white in colour, but they aged differently. The earlier parts remained white or off-white, while the ABS turned cream and tended to darken significantly depending on various factors. Changes at Fender happened gradually due to Leo's aversion to waste, and it's common to see parts from supposedly different eras on the same guitar. This guitar was a case in point, with the two surviving knobs being polystyrene and the switch tip and pickup covers being ABS.

## Hardware History

If you examine vintage Strat saddles, you will soon notice tooling marks on the rear fold over that look like a row of scratches. The arrangement of these marks never varies and, unless the saddle is severely corroded, it's easy to discern vintage saddles from even the best repros. Like the bridge plate, block and claw, these saddles were indisputably vintage.

I was equally convinced by the strap buttons and socket cup, although there was no way to pinpoint an exact date. In contrast, the neckplate, with its dash prefix serial number, was bang on for 1957 and less than 500 away from Clapton's 'Blackie'.

Elsewhere, I knew the tuners could not be original to the guitar. They had 'single line' covers, which put them into a 1956 to '64 timeframe, but all six had 'Patent Number' stamps under the baseplates and Kluson didn't start doing that until '58. Although they were definitely from the pre-CBS era, they were made some time after the guitar and, unfortunately, one post was damaged.

**Above:** Like many 1957 Stratocasters, the plastic parts are a mixture, with earlier white polystyrene tone knobs and yellowed ABS pickup covers and switch tip

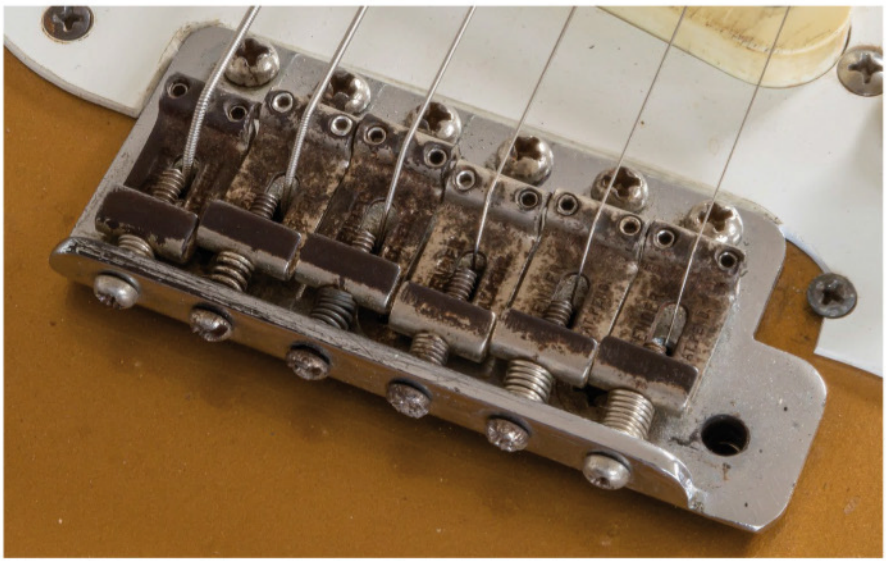
## Electric Evaluation

Although the volume potentiometer had been replaced and the original capacitor was long gone, both tone pots were the original Stackpoles with a manufacturing date stamp indicating the fourth week of 1957. More importantly, all three pickups appeared original, with the north up slug polarity that Fender used until 1960.

All three also read close to 5.8k, but the bridge and neck coils were wound with a darker and redder magnet wire than the middle pickup. Matt Bascetta of House Of Tone Pickups confirmed the darker coils were the original Formvar windings and the inferior-sounding middle pickup had been rewound with polysol wire.

The neck pickup's leadout wires had been spliced and heat-shrunk, indicating that it had probably changed position at some point. The original three-way switch had also been replaced by a five-way.

**Below:** The bridge saddles have all the correct tooling marks and there's nothing to suggest the string claw, 'plate and block aren't vintage originals



PHOTOS BY HUW PRICE

## And Now...

All this occurred back in 2015 and since then I managed to source a vintage switch, Matt Bascetta rewound the middle pickup, and Shai Ashkenazi of Imperial Vintage Guitars kindly gave me a vintage tuner to replace the broken one while I was in LA. But that's about it.

The Stratocaster's 70th anniversary year seems like the right time to bring this guitar back to its former glory and I'll be documenting the restoration process over subsequent issues. Besides refinishing, refretting and general refurbishment, there may be some tough decisions to make along the way and there could be some surprises. Watch this space.

***With thanks to Andrew Raymond of Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath for the loan of his 1956 Stratocaster***
**www.huwpriceguitar.com**

# Loud Speaker

As Zilla Cab's Paul Gough wraps up his column, he reflects on some of the key points from the Talking Loud series

We've covered quite a lot over the past few years here, but to break things down, if you're looking to sculpt your sound using cabs and speakers there are a few key points to consider. First, you're going to want to figure out if it's open- or closed-back that works best for you. Remember: open will give you a more ambient sound, more like a combo, and a closed-back cab will generally give you a more controlled and direct low-end.

Following on from this, you'll need to decide if it's a head and cab or a combo that you want. Combos are generally more compact and can give iconic sounds, but they're also less versatile than a head and cab, mostly because a head will give you opportunity to use anything from a 1x12 to a 4x12 and open- or closed-back cabs, whereas a combo is nearly always open-backed. That said, a lot of combos offer the option to add a cab and this can give a really cool versatile setup, allowing you to blend multiple sounds or speakers.

Now, if it's mixing speakers that you're into, we've talked about how you'll want to watch out for power ratings, and make sure the speakers don't have too big a gap between their sensitivity ratings. But the smoking gun, the one thing you need to get right above all else, is impedance: getting that wrong really can mess things up, so make sure you chat things through with a professional first.

Another topic that kept coming up is size and weight. Sometimes we just don't have the space for a big setup or maybe just need a rig that is more grab-and-go. In some of the first articles we talked through the advantages of neodymium speakers and their ability to vastly reduce weight, and also how vertical cabs can help you retain some of the spread and weight of sound of a larger cab in a smaller, more convenient package. This is particularly relevant since the onset of smaller high-quality amps that have come to the market over the past 15 or so years.

Finally, a speaker change is not always necessarily the answer. From experience, when customers are not happy with their current setup, it's often one of the above areas that needs to be addressed, rather than just changing out the speaker. It could be the lack of low-end and directness of sound for heavier players, or a lack of ambience and too hard-hitting tone for cleaner, more traditional players that is causing conflict – so a speaker won't always resolve this. Speakers are more for fine-tuning, unless the speaker choice has been completely wrong to start with, of course.

## Find Your Way

If there's one overall lesson to take from these past articles on speakers and cabs, it's this: there are no rights or wrongs in music. If you like the sound, then it's right. Speakers are something to be experienced – it's as much about the feeling in the room as the sound on a recording, and it's so very personal that no-one can tell you where you'll end up. I just hope that I've given a few signposts to help on the journey.

The trio of *Guitarist* editors (plus bassist Eric Mylod-Okafo) who have helped inspire Paul throughout his own playing journey

"When mixing speakers, the one thing you need to get right above all else is impedance"

So, to wrap things up, I'd like to say, after two and a half years of writing articles, I've had a blast. As a dyslexic kid, *Guitarist* was about the only reading I wanted to do, so as a 40-year-old kid it's been a pleasure to make a small contribution. As long as I can remember, I've looked up to all the writers and editors, and over the past 20 years had the pleasure of working with Neville Marten, Mick Taylor and Jamie Dickson, guys who won't quite get how they are my JK Rowling, CS Lewis and Enid Blyton. I'd like to end by saying, until next time, stay cool, hang tough and riff hard.

**www.zillacabs.com**

"Speakers are something to be experienced – it's as much about the feeling in the room as the sound on a recording"

A compact rig such as this provides a versatile, quality and lightweight solution to many gigging scenarios

PHOTO BY NEIL GODWIN

# David Davidson's Vintage Icons

Two equally important and iconic 12-strings with contrasting tonal advantages

## Electric 12-Strings

"The Fender Electric XII was by far the most recorded electric 12-string guitar. Everybody from Jimmy Page to Glen Campbell, Joe Perry, Joe Walsh, Pete Townshend, Bob Dylan and Tim Buckley played them. In fact, pretty much every 1960s or 70s record with electric 12-string guitar that wasn't The Beatles or The Byrds was recorded with a Fender.

"The Fender XII was available in sunburst and any custom colour that was available in 1965. This Sonic Blue is the only one I've seen, but I have heard about others. It's from earlier in 1965 and it's a very original guitar. By late 1965 they had changed from Klusons to the 'F'-stamped Schaller tuners. It's common to see mid- to late-1965 necks that were drilled for both sets of tuners. Look closely and you'll see one set of holes was never tapped for screws, but people often assume the tuners have been swapped.

"The 1965 necks were unbound with pearloid dots and a white pickguard. Later that year Fender added fretboard binding, and rectangular blocks replaced the dots in 1966. Some very early XIIs have pearloid pickguards, but these may have been prototypes. They never had mint 'guards, but Fender began putting tortoise 'guards on sunbursts and blondes.

"They remained in the catalogue until 1970, but I've never seen one made after 1968. They introduced polyester finishes that year, but every Fender XII I've seen had nitrocellulose lacquer. To ask around $300 for a guitar that was only going to be used once during a set was a lot of money at the time. People stopped buying them and the Electric XII was discontinued at the same time as the Jazzmaster and Jaguar.

"After cutting down the hockey stick headstock, Fender used the leftover necks and bodies to build the Custom and Maverick. They had to fill in the rear holes and paint the backs black so nobody would see, but they never really took off.

"Even by Rickenbacker standards, the 366 model is a truly unique guitar because it has a comb-like device that dampens the second set of strings. Some people call them 'convertibles' because you can use one as a six-string or a 12-string. They were available in the most common Jetglo, Fireglo and Mapleglo colours, and although I haven't seen one in another colour, I'm sure Rickenbacker could have done that and probably did.

"The comb pulled six of the strings out of the way and muted them, but you still hear a plunking sound. It adds weight, and when you release the comb, the strings will always be out of tune. The 366 has the same crushed pearl shark-tooth inlays as the 360, and all the other appointments are the same. A lot of people take the comb off to turn a

Rickenbacker became synonymous with electric 12-strings, such as this 'comb'-equipped 366 model below, but the Fender Electric XII, with its distinctive hockey stick headstock, was just as important

366 into a 360 12-string. Or you can tune it normally as a six-string and enjoy what is essentially a 360 for a fraction of the price.

"They have the stereo Rick-O-Sound feature, which you can't get with the Fender, but I think the Fender pickups are more dynamic and can go from warm and almost jazzy to glassy treble. Rickenbackers have a bell-like sound and stand alone as folk-rock guitars, but the Fender Electric XII is more of a true rocking instrument. They had split-coil pickups so players could select a wide range of tones, but they couldn't jangle like Rickenbackers.

"The Fender XII had a wider and fuller neck with a greater string spread that felt more comfortable and easier to play. Rickenbackers are traditionally thinner-necked, and part of the reason they sound the way they do is that they're strung the opposite way to traditional 12-strings. When you play the low strings, you hit the

> "Rickys have a bell-like sound and stand alone as folk-rock guitars, but the Fender Electric XII is more of a true rocking instrument"

lower octave string first, which results in a deeper tone on the down strum. Lots of people don't know that and I've bought Rickenbackers that were strung the wrong way by shops that didn't know any better.

"Fender and Rickenbacker electric 12-strings guitars are equally iconic, but it's like comparing apples and oranges because each guitar is so far towards the end of the other's tonal spectrum. If you want the tone of George Harrison, Roger McGuinn, Tom Petty and others, a Rickenbacker is the only choice. But if you're more into the 12-string sound on *Stairway To Heaven*, The Who's *Tommy* or *Beck's Bolero*, you need a Fender because they're so well rounded. The Rickenbacker may be more of a one-trick pony, but it's a tool that many players like to have in their box." **[HP]**

Vintage guitar veteran David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
**www.wellstrungguitars.com / info@wellstrungguitars.com / 001 (516) 221-0563**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAIGE DAVIDSON / WELL STRUNG GUITARS

# Blues Headlines

*Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks*

## Hendrix On Rhythm

**Tutor** Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Lewis Guitar Works Pequeno Bastardo & Marshall JTM45 MkII Reissue
**Difficulty** ★★★★☆ | 20 mins per example

**IT'S WELL KNOWN** that Jimi earned his living and learned his trade as a sideman before stepping into the spotlight himself, though there had already been times he'd been in trouble for upstaging the main act. To the mainstream press, Hendrix became the guitar-burning wild man of rock – the result of orchestrated publicity stunts to capture the public's imagination and compete with contemporaries such as The Who.

However, to those in the know he combined an unprecedented range of influences from Elvis through to Albert King, Curtis Mayfield and Bob Dylan. His overdriven Strat tones, delivered through walls of blisteringly loud Marshall stacks, were magnificent, of course, but that was far from the only colour in his palette. To this day, there are chord voicings and guitar styles indelibly associated with Jimi. Lots of fantastic guitar music has been made in this style by subsequent players such as SRV, John Mayer and Eric Johnson, but all of these freely acknowledge Hendrix as their inspiration.

Now, down to some practicalities, I view the example piece as a highly embellished chord progression, though it does contain pentatonic elements – most obviously in its final moments. Certain voicings or inversions of the chords particularly lend themselves to this style, which draws from the CAGED chord approach (shapes that recur all over the fretboard but can all be related back to these open chords). Sometimes it can be better to 'reverse engineer' a piece of music that appeals to us and recognise the patterns, rather than learn the patterns then try to 'break' them to make music. I'm looking to take a balanced approach in this example solo, which is a very concentrated 'study' in this style. Don't feel you should be playing this busily all the time! I hope this is useful and enjoyable and I'll see you next time. G

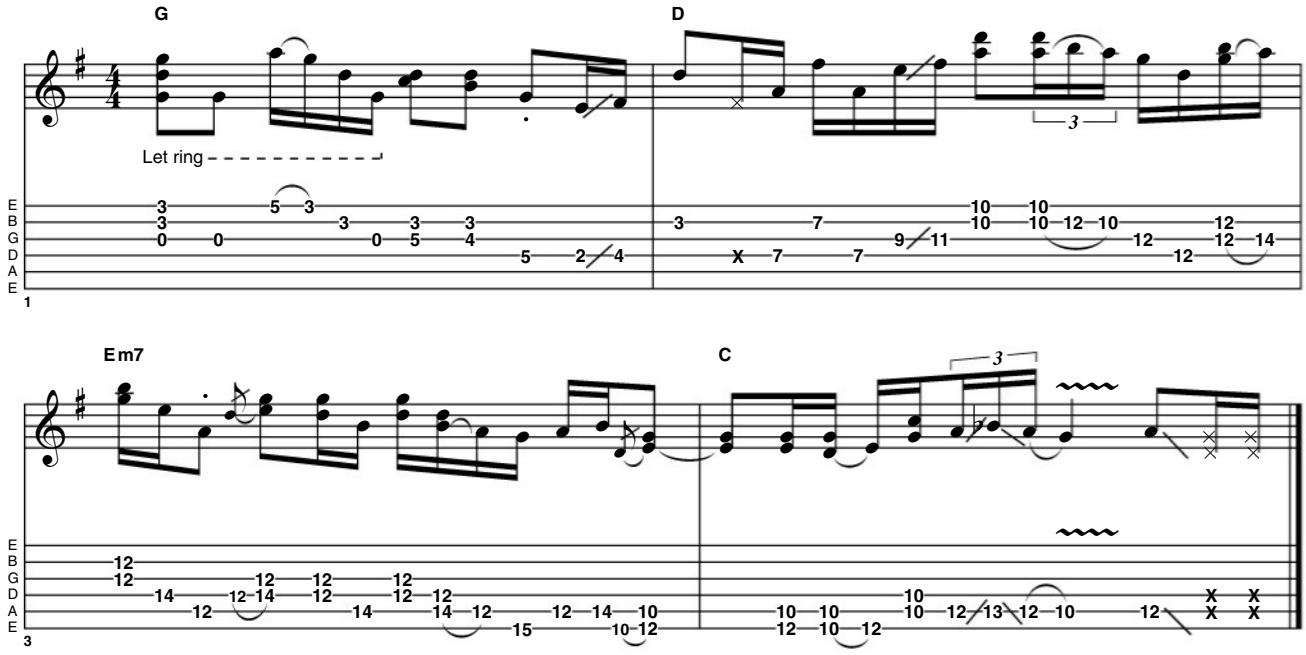
**Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from iTunes and Amazon**

## Example 1

**BASICALLY, THIS EXAMPLE** consists of G-D-Em-C chords, though each of these is embellished to a greater or lesser extent. The initial G is a fragment of the 'C'-shaped CAGED chord, which is heard as a G chord in this position with a barre at the 5th fret. This isn't the most comfortable way of playing G, but reducing it down to a triad (and perhaps noticing its similarity to Em7) makes it much more practical.

# Example 2

**THIS SECOND EXAMPLE** follows the same basic chord pattern as Example 1, but we get a bit more 'out there' with some pentatonic-based doublestops. Starting with one of Jimi's favourite voicings (try moving it around the fretboard and you'll recognise the sound) in open position, we then cycle through three different inversions of D major – though the third one really forms the beginning of the ending run. I choose to view this as a pentatonic run played with doublestops, though the final notes also function as an unusual C chord.

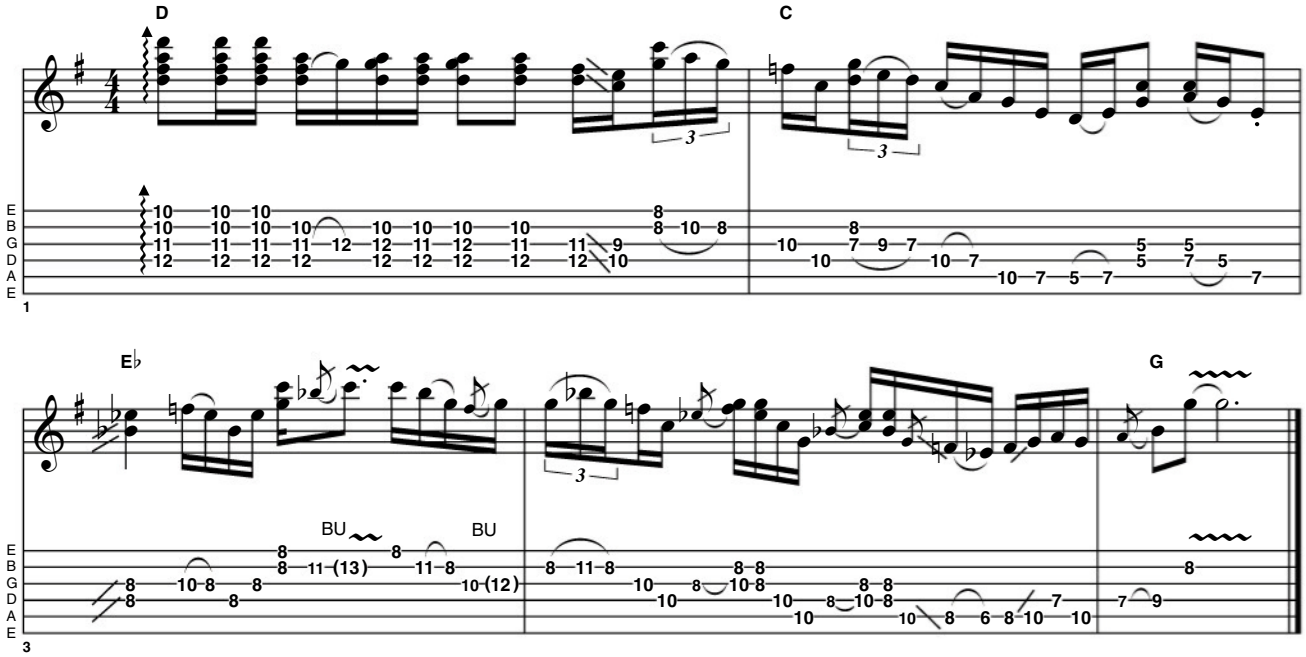



# Example 3

**THE CHORDS CHANGE HERE** to D-C-E♭-G. These are all major, and you may be recognising by now that only a couple of chord shapes are actually in use here! Hopefully the patterns of embellishment are starting to feel familiar, too, moving down the fretboard to G major, then jumping back up for some sliding pentatonic doublestops. This phrase slides between three of the G major pentatonic shapes (3, 4 and 5), but at some point you'll start using licks like this without particularly considering the shapes.

# Example 4

**THERE ARE JUST THREE CHORDS** in this example: C-D-E♭, the last of which is held as a kind of suspense before resolving back to G and the beginning of the next cycle. The D could be viewed as a fragment of the 'E'-shape barre chord at the 10th fret in CAGED terms, then moving down to a doublestop lick based around the C chord two frets below. Shifting up to E♭, this can be viewed as the same chord shape used for the D at the start of Example 3 but making much more use of the convenient pentatonic scale in this same register.




## Hear It Here

### JIMI HENDRIX
EXPERIENCE HENDRIX: THE BEST OF JIMI HENDRIX

Let's start with the most obvious 'best of' choices and move on from there. Of course, *Little Wing*, *The Wind Cries Mary* and *Bold As Love* remain definitive benchmarks of this style, perhaps born from the necessity of filling out the sound of a trio without simply playing block chords. Being the studio versions, there are some overdubs going on here and there, but these also give an insight into how Jimi viewed chord voicings and harmony.

### THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE
ELECTRIC LADYLAND

The Experience's third and final studio album shows Jimi exploring the recording studio as an instrument in its own right (reportedly to the frustration of manager Chas Chandler!). You can hear him adding the kind of embellishments we've been looking at to *Have You Ever Been (To Electric Ladyland)* and *All Along The Watchtower*, though you'll need to listen carefully through the various overdubs. Another great example is the latter part of *1983...(A Merman I Should Turn To Be)*.

### THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE
BBC SESSIONS

It's always interesting to hear how an artist interprets their work live, especially when there have been studio overdubs and production flourishes on the original recordings. Here, *Love Or Confusion* shows Jimi managing to sound like more than one guitarist is playing, *Hey Joe* showcases pentatonic lines and doublestops intertwined to fill out the trio format with a range of classic Hendrix tones, while *Wait Until Tomorrow* has some impressive co-ordination between funk rhythm playing and singing.

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